



**POLICIES FOR
HUMAN
CAPITAL
DEVELOPMENT
TUNISIA**

AN ETF **TORINO PROCESS**
ASSESSMENT

Disclaimer

This report was prepared in the framework of the Torino Process 2018-20 by Evelyn Viertel, Thierry Foubert and Francesca Rosso, ETF.

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PREAMBLE

The European Training Foundation (ETF) assessment provides an external, forward-looking analysis of the country's human capital development issues and vocational education and training (VET) policy responses in a lifelong learning perspective. It identifies challenges related to education and training policy and practice that hinder the development and use of human capital. It takes stock of these challenges and puts forward recommendations on possible solutions to address them.

These assessments are a key deliverable of the Torino Process, an initiative launched by the ETF in 2010 aimed at providing a periodic review of VET systems in the wider context of human capital development and inclusive economic growth. In providing a high-quality assessment of VET policy from a lifelong learning perspective, the process builds on four key principles: ownership, participation, holistic and evidence-based analysis.

For ETF, human capital development is the provision of support to countries for the creation of lifelong learning systems that provide opportunities and incentives for people to develop their skills, competences, knowledge and attitudes throughout their lives for the sake of employment and realisation of their potential, and as a contribution to prosperous, innovative and inclusive societies.

The purpose of the assessments is to provide a reliable source of information for planning and monitoring national education and training policies for human capital development, as well as for programming and policy dialogue in support of these policies by the European Union and other donors.

The ETF assessments rely on evidence from the countries collected through a standardised reporting template (national reporting framework) through a participatory process involving a wide variety of actors with a high degree of ownership by the country. The findings and recommendations of the ETF assessment have been shared and discussed with national authorities and beneficiaries.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This European Training Foundation (ETF) assessment provides an external, forward-looking analysis of the country's Human Capital Development (HCD) issues and Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy responses in a lifelong learning perspective. It is based on evidence provided from a national and eight regional Torino Process reports for Tunisia (2020), using a standardised questionnaire (National Reporting Framework), as well as additional information sources.

Context

In Tunisia in 2011, thousands took to the streets amid frustration of poverty, joblessness and corruption. Millions of people hoped it would inspire change in Tunisia. Since then, the country has been successfully undertaking a democratic transition of its policies and institutions. A new constitution was adopted in 2014 (JORT, 2015). However, challenges stemming from the dire socio-economic situation, security concerns, and frequent political changes now risk overshadowing the significant progress achieved so far.

Tunisia is a lower middle-income country. The country is engaged in a process of integrating into the world economy, such as through Association Agreements and negotiations with the European Union (EU) for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, the Agadir Agreement, and talks with the World Trade Organization. However, the impact on the country's economy has so far been low. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at 1.0% in 2019, down from 2.5% in 2018 (Institut National de la Statistique – INS).

Balghouthi (2018) claims that the Tunisian economy suffers from several structural dysfunctions, including inequalities, corruption, deindustrialisation and a prevalence of low value-added sectors. According to the Global Competitiveness Index 2019, on which Tunisia ranked 87th out of 140 economies, government bureaucracy and political instability are factors that impact negatively on the business environment. The vast majority of big enterprises remained state-owned, and public administration is looming. Outside the public sector, there is a high level of informality and a large number of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). They offer rather low-skilled jobs and have little capacity to grow and innovate. Job creation has been low, even in periods of sustained GDP growth of 2.5% to 5% annually before 2019.

Tunisia's economy has been severely hit by the COVID-19 outbreak. The large tourism sector and exporters who supply the European automotive and textile industries have felt a strong negative impact. More stress is expected to happen as the crisis spreads through the domestic economy. Migrants' remittances have dropped due to the economic crisis in Europe. Households have drawn down savings and cut consumption. An unprecedented contraction of economic activity of 21.6% occurred during the second quarter of 2020 (INS). In July 2020, inflation was up by 5.7% over the previous year (INS). Unemployment will rise further, incomes will fall, and import prices will increase. Many businesses face cash flow shortages because of temporary closures and lower revenues from consumption and exports. The World Economic Outlook by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from October 2020 expects GDP to drop by 7% in 2020, the lowest level since Tunisia's independence in 1956 (TAP, 2020b).

According to Oxford Business Group (2019), the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector has the most potential for growth and attracting foreign investments, followed by energy and mining, industry and tourism sectors.

Tunisia has a young population, with 39% being under 25 years of age in 2018 (Eurostat, 2020, p. 19). Developing a meaningful career path for these young women and men and helping them into gainful economic activity is a major concern for Tunisia. The weak economy hampers people's participation in the labour market and leads to rising unemployment, informal sector jobs and migration, which affects young people and women disproportionately (UNECA, 2019). In view of the high unemployment levels, more than 100 000 young people have left Tunisia since the revolution.

Tunisia's overarching strategy is the National Development Plan 2016–2020 (MDICI, 2017). Strategies for the education and training sector include the Strategic Plan for the Education Sector 2016–2020 (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2016), the National VET Reform Strategy 2016–2020 (Ministère de la Formation Professionnelle et de l'Emploi – MFPE¹), and the Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research 2015–2025 (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique - MESRS). In May 2019, the MFPE and social partners, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), launched discussions for a new National Employment Strategy for the period 2020 to 2030. Prior to that, a first background analysis had been published (ILO, 2018a).

Public institutions have taken ownership of these strategies. However, the pace of taking concrete actions has been slow, despite substantial funding support from the EU and other donors. Frequent changes of governments and their political agendas present barriers to implementing reforms in a consistent manner. Also, it is important how local actors are able to contextualise the new concepts and pilots introduced with support from donors.

Most national strategies are close to their expiry dates, which provides an opportunity to undertake in-depth analyses of the state of play and redefine Tunisia's post-2020 policy priorities; it is also a chance to look at what local budgets and capacity can absorb. For donors, there might be an issue of moving from coordination to closer cooperation, for example through joint programming and implementation exercises.

Findings on human capital

Public sector jobs are scarce and the private sector does not create sufficient jobs to absorb the growing number of young, educated labour market entrants. Jobless growth resulted in an annual deficit of around 19 000 jobs between 2011 and 2017 (ILO, 2018a). With ongoing deindustrialisation, Tunisia's employment structure has been shifting towards the services sector. The latter accounted for the largest share of employment (54%), followed by industry (33%) and agriculture (13%) in 2019 (ILO, 2018a, estimates). There are huge regional differences: jobs exist mostly in the capital city Tunis and coastal areas, and less so in inland regions.

¹ The MFPE functions have meanwhile been absorbed into the Ministère de la Jeunesse, du Sport et de l'Intégration Professionnelle (MJSIP).

Challenge 1: Activity and employment rates, especially of women and young people, are low despite increasing levels of education

The Tunisian labour market is characterised by a low and slightly declining annual rate of the active population – 51.3% in 2019 versus 52.5% in 2015 for those aged 15 to 64 (Eurostat, 2020, p. 38) – but also a growing share of people with higher education degrees in the active population, especially females. Despite females' increasing levels of education, their labour market participation remains one of the lowest in the world. The employment rate for those aged 15+ is low, at 39.7% in 2019 (INS), with females, and especially young females, generally having fewer employment opportunities than males. Some changing trends are, however, evident: young females are more present on the labour market than their older peers. Also, the share of female labour market participants increases with their level of education. Employment rates of females with tertiary education are consistently higher than for those with a low level of education (but similar to those with medium-level qualifications). It is important that such trends are consolidated and that the higher female activity rates translate into more jobs for women and lower levels of female unemployment.

Challenge 2: Many people work in precarious jobs without decent wages and social protection

Jobs are created in agriculture, manufacturing, construction and service sectors such as tourism and trade. However, many of these jobs are of an informal and/or vulnerable category. The ILO estimates that 20% of employed Tunisians were in vulnerable employment in 2019, which includes 'own-account workers' (i.e. self-employed people) and contributing family members. This also concerns women who often work in agriculture, the textile industry or trade. Informal employment was estimated to account for almost two-thirds of total employment, involving more males and young people. Overall, 84% of the jobs held by young people aged 15 to 19 and 42% by those aged 20 to 24 were informal (ILO, 2018b, using 2014 data). This often implies low-skilled jobs, poor working conditions, low pay and a lack of social protection, and ultimately leads to a devaluation of human capital.

Challenge 3: Unemployment particularly affects young people, especially females and even educated people, pointing to inefficiencies in the development and use of human capital

Unemployment presents a persistent challenge in Tunisia, with slight improvements in recent years (15.3% in 2019 versus 18.3% in 2011, INS). The biggest gains were made with regard to youth unemployment (aged 15–24), which decreased from 42.3% in 2011 to 34.4% in 2019. However, unemployment still affects young people and females disproportionately. It also affects people with medium and high levels of education, especially females. In view of the low technological level of most MSMEs, employers often still prefer to hire semi-skilled or unskilled labour. In 2019, 36.7% of highly educated women were looking for jobs, compared to 16.2% of their male peers, although there have been improvements in this indicator since its peak in 2012. The fact that many university graduates are unemployed is particularly alarming, as it suggests problems with the types of studies they pursue (but also the low level of jobs offered), which leads to a low return on public and private investments in human capital formation.

Where people reside strongly determines their level of unemployment. Unemployment rates were lowest, at 9.9%, in the centre-east of the country, and highest, at 26.2%, in the southwest (ETF, 2017;

ILO, 2018a²). Geographical factors also determine gender disparities: while differences between young women and men in dynamic urban areas are small, they are much more pronounced in the less dynamic and rural areas. Young women living in the northern, central or interior areas are more vulnerable to unemployment, while those living in southern areas are often completely outside the labour market (Mansuy and Werquin, 2015).

Challenge 4: Young people experience a difficult transition from school to work – one in three are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

Young Tunisians generally experience a difficult transition from education to work. Many first-time jobseekers face unemployment for several months, if not years. The weak business environment, territorial disparities, the lack of relevant basic and technical skills of young people, and weak job information and matching services are all factors that complicate the labour market integration of young people. A slow and difficult transition to the labour market can have a lasting and discouraging impact on the careers, skills and future income of individuals. However, tracer studies show that young people who graduated from VET centres have better prospects on the labour market. Among the 2012 graduates, two-thirds of the surveyed individuals were in employment four years after graduation, while just under one-third of all VET graduates were unemployed (ONEQ, 2017). In 2018, only 22.1% of the surveyed VET graduates cited themselves as unemployed (ONEQ, 2020).

What is concerning is the fact that, in 2019, one in three young people aged 15 to 24 (or 32% in total; male rate: 31.0%; female rate: 33.0%, INS) who did not complete secondary education were NEETs. The NEETs rate has not improved over recent years. Traditionally, the NEETs rate has been higher for females. However, in 2019, females were able to considerably narrow the gap with males, with their NEETs rate improving by 5.1 percentage points over the previous year.

Challenge 5: Skills mismatches point to an inefficient use of human capital

Closely linked to the above are the existing skills mismatches. High unemployment coexists with a high number of unfilled job vacancies. Three out of four enterprises reported difficulties in finding suitably qualified candidates (ITCEQ, 2018). It is skilled workers and specialised technicians who are being sought, particularly in the textile, hotel and catering, construction and ICT sectors. Medium- and high-skilled profiles are also particularly affected by the 'brain drain' phenomenon (migration of highly skilled people). The pertinent skills mismatch on the Tunisian labour market, in its multiple dimensions, continues to hamper further economic development and a more efficient use of human capital. Some initiatives have been taken to employ young graduates. This includes the Tunisie Digitale 2020 plan, which aims to develop the ICT infrastructure throughout the country and services linked to ICTs.

The dramatic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to further aggravate existing economic and labour market challenges. With a view to containing the state budget, the Tunisian government announced the freezing of public sector recruitment, except for some priority occupations (TAP, 2020a). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020) estimates that the recession could put at stake as many as 275 000 jobs in micro and small businesses, while unemployment could rise to 21.6%. In the second quarter of 2020, unemployment stood at 18% (INS).

² INS data for 2016 quoted in ETF (2017), but largely confirmed by INS data for the second quarter of 2017, as used in ILO (2018a).

People, especially in disadvantaged regions, could give up job searches and become further alienated from the labour market. All this could lead to a further underutilisation of existing human capital.

Challenge 6: Educational attainment rates are improving but basic skills levels are of major concern

Tunisia has managed to keep up its high level of public expenditure in education – 6.1% of GDP in 2017 (INS) – and greatly improved the literacy and educational attainment rates of its population. Many of Tunisia’s young people are educated, which includes a considerable number of people with higher education degrees. However, these positive trends contrast with the persistently high early school leaving rate, which concerns more than one in three young people aged 18 to 24 (37.1% in 2019). This is due to a lack of appropriate programmes, facilities, transport, and pedagogical and family support. There is a close link with the NEETs rate, as cited above. The Tunisian education system continues to be selective, leaving fewer choices to students from poorer education and family backgrounds.

Furthermore, there are concerns with the quality of education. In 2017, the learning-adjusted years of schooling corresponded to only 6.3 years (World Bank Human Development Index 2018). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test in 2015 showed a sharp decline in reading skills: as many as 71.6% of students aged 15 were low performers (compared to 50.2% in 2009). Under-achievement in science increased to 65.9% (53.7% in 2009) and in mathematics to 74.8% (73.6% in 2009). This is serious because poor basic skills prevent young people from further learning and acquiring higher-level skills. Low-skilled people are typically also more vulnerable to changing economic conditions.

Challenge 7: VET enrolment numbers are low due to the lack of attractive VET offers and missing pathways to higher education

VET is generally seen as leading to jobs with low social status and pay. It presents a dead-end street, despite previous attempts to create pathways from VET into higher education. The share of VET students in secondary education in Tunisia decreased from 13.9% in 2011 to 9.1% in 2016. This low number of young people enrolling in VET programmes is exacerbated by the high level of dropouts from VET at 22.3% (ITCEQ, 2018, p. 16).

High-quality VET is by and large missing, which would train the skilled workers and technicians who are in great demand on the labour market, instead of turning out a high number of university graduates in fields with limited job prospects. Financial mechanisms for continuous training and active labour market programmes are in place for both employees and unemployed jobseekers (e.g. *droit de tirage, credit d’impôt*). However, opportunities are limited, including for young unemployed graduates, to upgrade their skills or retrain in fields sought after by the labour market. VET has lacked overall reform despite the earlier recognition by the MFPE of its general weaknesses, the existence of the ambitious National VET Reform Strategy 2016–2020 and small improvements in pilot areas. To a certain extent, this has something to do with the low esteem in which VET is held by society and political elites.

Challenge 8: Opportunities for continuing VET are underutilised

There is a demand for continuous education, skills upgrading and retraining. Of the active population aged 25 to 64, 2.9% participated in training in 2019, a significant increase from 1.3% in 2015 (INS, Labour Force Survey – LFS). A policy for continuing VET exists, detailed at the level of the reform, as follows:

- Governance of the financing mechanism
- Efficiency and effectiveness: quality approach/labelling and professionalisation of actors

Further to these aspects, the National centre for continuing training and professional Promotion (Centre National de Formation Continue et Promotion Professionnelle (CNFCPP) operates to:

- Digitalise training dossiers
- Develop counselling and guidance for enterprises, social partners and providers,
- Favouring lifelong learning through the Labour higher Institutes (Instituts superieurs du travail)

However, despite structural reforms and the existence of a training levy system in Tunisia³, continuing VET presents still some issues. Red tape (bureaucracy) and complex application processes are the main reasons for the fact that the training fund remained underutilised for continuing VET, with only 10% of the available funds used in 2018 (ILO, MFPE and CNFCPP, 2017). Discussions are underway on how to simplify the use of fund mechanisms to improve access to lifelong learning.

Recommendations for action

Chapter 3 concentrates on the VET sector, as many of the professions that form the backbone of economic and social developments hinge on vocational qualifications (see e.g. OECD, 2020). In addition, vocational skills have shown to improve the labour market chances of Tunisian graduates. VET, as used in the context in this report, denotes a broader field, embracing initial to continuing VET for young people and adults, at different levels of qualifications, and incorporating the basic skills and competences essential for exercising one's profession and for further learning.

Relevant strategies and action plans are in place to comprehensively reform the VET sector. However, necessary reforms have not gone ahead to the desired degree. We will analyse the key challenges and priorities that could help system reform with the ultimate aim to better serve the economy, individuals and society. We summarise these challenges under 'external consistency' and 'internal consistency', which are key concepts in any system reform.

Improved external consistency or relevance of VET through ...

The first major challenge of the Tunisian VET system is related to the lack of external consistency, i.e. a system that to a certain extent is not in line with the expectations and needs of its clients. It requires a structured skills identification system; a revision of governance and financing arrangements at all levels, involving relevant actors; a more comprehensive approach to overhaul legislation and implementation practices; and an adjustment, over time, of the network of training providers and offers in line with existing and future skills requirements.

... skills anticipation and career guidance for better labour market outcomes

Demographic, social, labour market and skills data would need to be gathered more systematically at national, sectoral and regional levels and inform a restructuring of the network of VET providers and programmes. Public funds for training could be used more efficiently by preparing learners for their integration in society and the labour market. In the absence of a sophisticated – and, admittedly, costly

³ It should be noted that a "system of training levy" exists in Tunisia, as well as drawing rights over private enterprises: i) newly created (less than 3 years of activity), ii) exempted or excluded from paying the training tax; iii) SMEs in specific sectors identified on an annual basis; iv) Where the training levy/tax corresponds to less than 1000 D.

– system of labour market intelligence at national and regional levels, informed discussions with economic think tanks, experts and employers on the future needs of the economy at national, sectoral and regional levels may be helpful. The ultimate aim would be to devise, and implement over time, a mid- to long-term plan for the gradual adjustment of the network of (publicly funded) training providers and courses to better suit identified needs. Regularly collected information on the satisfaction levels and career paths of VET graduates could also serve as useful inputs. Furthermore, more (online) opportunities for career information as well as counselling and guidance in and outside schools would help young people determine their future education and professional careers. Related digitalisation efforts of employment offices are a step in the right direction and could be a useful source of information.

... new and coherent multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance arrangements at central, sectoral and regional/local levels

It is recognised that the currently highly centralised governance and financing of VET are among the main factors that hamper more relevant VET provision in Tunisia. The high youth unemployment and huge differences between the regions in Tunisia call for new arrangements in the field of managing education, training and employment policies that incorporate the concepts of ‘decentralisation’ or ‘regionalisation’. A comprehensive and coherent approach, which has the potential to answer socio-economic and related skills needs more efficiently, is needed to foster a multi-stakeholder governance and financing system at national, sectoral and regional/local levels.

With the Social Pact, an overall tripartite structure to advise on VET policies is in place. However, there is an issue of operationalising the provisions of the Social Pact and creating all kinds of public–private partnerships. Social partner organisations at national and sectoral levels should be able to participate in the dialogue on skills development policies on an equal footing with government. Bipartite sector skills councils, bringing together VET curriculum experts and employers, could be set up for priority sectors to analyse skills and training needs and develop respective qualifications and curricula. It is clear that all partners to the various forms of dialogue and expert work would need to become familiar with their new roles and enhance their capacity.

The roles and responsibilities for overall strategy design, system planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Professional Integration (Ministère de la Jeunesse, du Sport et de l'Intégration Professionnelle – MJSIP), the Tunisian VET Agency (Agence Tunisienne de la Formation Professionnelle – ATFP), the social partners, the Ministry of National Defence (as training provider) and the private providers would need to be strengthened. The MJSIP, into which VET functions have now been integrated, would have to facilitate overall reform and increase the relevance and quality of VET for young people and adults in Tunisia. Furthermore, there is a need for the MJSIP, ATFP and their partners to design and implement common national frameworks for qualifications, quality assurance, transparency and accountability, under which sector-specific training agencies – such as the Tourism Training Agency (Agence de Formation dans les Métiers du Tourisme – AFMT), the Agricultural Extension and Training Agency (Agence de la Vulgarisation et de la Formation Agricoles – AVFA), and all regional and local actors – can act autonomously.

Active involvement of regional and local stakeholders in the design and implementation of VET and employment policies – as piloted for example through the Programme d'Appui à la Formation et à l'Insertion Professionnelle (PAFIP: Programme to support training and job integration) and the EU-funded Initiative régionale d'appui au développement économique durable (IRADA: Regional Initiative

for Sustainable Economic Development) projects – is key to unlocking the economic, employment and social development potential of the regions. That is to say that, also at regional and local levels, roles and responsibilities have to be redefined for the different actors, including the Regional Directorates for VET and Employment (Direction régionale de la Formation Professionnelle et de l'Emploi), local offices of the National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment (Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi et le Travail Indépendant - ANETI) and the social partners. Adequate resources, approaches and tools are necessary to strengthen the capacity of actors in the regions and allow for efficient and effective management of the new tasks, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of policies (see e.g. ETF and MFPE, 2017).

However, one of the major preconditions for a functioning decentralised system for managing VET and employment policies is their embeddedness in an overall, well-prepared administrative reform of the country. Such a reform would need to reduce today's weak and inefficient administrative structures and regroup them into bigger, potentially self-sufficient, self-governing units. It would need to assign not only more responsibilities, but also more resources to regional and local administrations. It requires a national plan and new legislation that stipulates how functions shall be divided between the state, governorates, districts and municipalities in a future decentralised system, which resources shall be transferred from the state, and which types of local taxes regional or local authorities would be able to collect. Without a proper financial base, any decentralisation will just remain a piece of paper.

In the meantime, the ATFP and other VET agencies can go ahead and pilot new approaches for decentralised management of VET with the help of donor projects. The ATFP and the other VET agencies could deliberately promote the formation of networks involving all relevant stakeholders to identify skills needs and create partnerships for employment and skills at regional/local levels. The regions are encouraged to do their own planning, based on prior identification of skills and training needs in the given region or governorate or a specific sector (e.g. tourism in Médenine).

Communities, employers' and employees' associations, as well as individual employers are key players in all aspects mentioned above. Recognising the importance to promote local economic and social progress, they are encouraged to be involved in economic, labour market and skills needs analyses, as well as the design, delivery and monitoring of training policies. Initial training for young people plays an equally important part as second-chance education, skills upgrading or retraining measures for adults. In this context, an earlier report for the Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2012 (Walther, 2011) highlights the significance of building skills required in the informal sector, which is widespread in Tunisia.

Building on the Government decree no. 2019-802, there is a need to strengthen the autonomy of VET providers, which in turn are managed by competent school boards and collaborate with relevant actors in the region (see also below). Further efforts could be taken to turn some providers into centres of excellence, with additional functions of national or sectoral relevance and possibly funded jointly with the private sector.

More autonomy of regional actors and VET providers will have to be accompanied by functioning national frameworks that ensure quality and accountability, and efficient use of public funding. Such frameworks typically include quality-assured qualifications and/or programmes (frame curricula) that have been approved by national or economic sector bodies and to which VET provision would be adjusted. Various other quality assurance mechanisms, including self-assessments and inspections of VET providers, would have to be put in place to set the quality standards for VET provision and

encourage VET providers to continuously develop and improve. This could include linking public VET funding partially to student retention and skills outcomes.

... a monitoring and evaluation system to assess progress and inform policy design

In addition, to enable national-level monitoring and evaluation of the system, VET providers and regional actors would need to report regularly against a nationally agreed set of indicators, for which a number of management tools and guidelines would be needed. This would include, among others, a comprehensive VET management information system to help the regional and national levels to monitor processes and outcomes of autonomous providers and design and plan VET policies overall. Respective data would need to be translated into, for example, enrolments, the number and qualifications of personnel, the purchase of equipment and materials, and the number of accommodation places.

While the MJSIP and their partners have the leadership for revising VET governance and financing arrangements, the ownership of suggested reforms clearly increases when the actors concerned are consulted from the outset. A major dialogue process involving a multitude of actors will have to be instigated, which requires a great deal of strategic oversight and planning, technical, legal and communication skills, and last but not least human and financial resources inside the MJSIP, ATFP and their dialogue partners. Any changes to governance and financing arrangements will need to be reflected in changes to legislation. Tunisian actors are recommended to take a more comprehensive approach to overhauling the legal framework for initial and continuing VET, including base laws and secondary legislation. Enshrined in the new legislation should be a funding model that underpins the new governance arrangements and promotes education and training in a lifelong learning perspective.

An undertaking of this size is by no means a quick fix. Even if all actors agreed to and made use of appropriate management tools and capacity, the new arrangements would require years to prepare and take root. They necessitate support across the political spectrum, a clear roadmap, financial and technical support, as well as close monitoring in a constant cycle of designing, implementing, evaluating and redesigning policy.

Improved internal consistency or quality of VET provision through ...

The second major challenge relates to improved internal consistency of the VET system, i.e. the improvement and better alignment of key elements, such as curricula, teaching and learning materials, teachers' skills and opportunities for work-based learning (WBL), with a view to helping young and adult learners acquire the practical, work-related skills as required by the labour market and specified in qualifications. Quality assurance mechanisms in this context are to cover all elements of the system.

... strengthening the capacity of autonomous VET providers

Strengthening the autonomy of training centres, within agreed national frameworks and with support from partners, could potentially lead to increasing the relevance and quality of VET provision. Under a revised legal framework for VET that incorporates governance and financing within a decentralised setting and within national frameworks for qualifications, quality assurance and accountability (reporting), authorities, agencies, regional directorates, vocational training centres and their local partners could practise new forms of cooperation and authority. Even with the existing legal framework, Tunisia could take further steps to operationalise VET school autonomy, delegating more responsibilities to training centres and their partners and finding pragmatic ways to incentivise their entrepreneurial spirit. Local actors could be entrusted to participate in key decisions relating to the

choice of their training offers; the recruitment and (extra) remuneration of staff; the management of all affairs of the training centre, from marketing its own courses, enrolments and the development of curricula integrating WBL to teaching and learning resources; career guidance activities; the signing of agreements with companies; the signing of other contracts (such as for renting out premises or producing products or delivering services for the local community); and the generation and use of budget. Social partners, students and family representatives can make useful contributions to the management and development of training centres.

The role of principals and teachers, alongside their economic partners, needs to be strengthened in relation to the development of the curriculum and teaching. Teacher training centres could support and coordinate teachers to develop up-to-date instructional materials in a collaborative manner. There is also an issue of nurturing evaluation practices at the level of training centres.

By diversifying the sources of funding (state, region/municipality, employer, centre's own resources), training centres may be put in a position to acquire up-to-date equipment and consumables.

... the continuous professional development (CPD) of VET teachers and trainers

The MJSIP and different stakeholders should work together to agree on CPD strategies, to improve the normative framework for VET teachers and trainers, to set objectives in the 2025 National Strategy for Vocational Education and to define a feasible action plan. The Centre National de Formation de Formateurs et d'Ingénierie de Formation National (CENAFFIF – National Centre for the Training of Trainers and Training Engineering), perhaps through a collaboration with industry and other professional CPD providers, may review their programmes and introduce modern and varied methodologies. Tools need to be developed to identify needs and funding mechanisms for the technical training of teachers. Better coordination between regional structures and training centres and their partners is key to providing the required materials and human resources. Training centres have an important role in analysing their training needs and sharing and using this information for the planning and coordination of CPD.

The MJSIP is also asked to consider or revise the status, compensation, training and recognition offered to teachers with mentoring roles at training centres. Mentorship might be used more generally as a form of CPD for VET trainers and principals. CPD opportunities should be linked to improvements in teaching, which are identified through feedback, and to career development. Where possible, CPD should be designed to prepare trainers and principals to take on enhanced responsibilities and to gain recognition through promotion. National aggregated records of CPD participation could be published (ETF, 2019).

... extending and improving WBL arrangements

Evidence suggests that, where WBL in companies is made a structural element of training provision, a smoother transition from school to work is achieved, rather than studying first and then working (OECD, 2010; ETF, 2013, among others). Sectors where WBL is deemed to have some potential for development in Tunisia include aeronautics, automotive components, computers, textile and clothing, tourism and crafts. On the other hand, agriculture and the Professional Technician Certificate (Brevet de Technicien Professionnel), for which WBL presents a major problem, would require specific national support measures.

It is recommended that learning under the 'F0 apprenticeship' scheme is complemented with training at a centre. Employers may also contact private training centres who offer relevant complementary

theoretical and soft skills training. The success of such an approach requires a flexible funding mechanism that ensures the activities of private operators. Funding might be granted only when a company is ready to take care of the intern during the training. The participation of private sector professionals in the management of training centres, reduced teaching loads and the reimbursement of travel expenses of school coordinators are essential for enabling WBL. Company training periods need to be carefully planned, ideally as an integral part of the VET curriculum. It is necessary to have trained tutors instruct in companies. With a view to implementing workplace training support units, professional and trade union organisations could be entitled to certain funding, which would allow them to play their part in supervising members and be a credible and representative intermediary with the MJSIP. The training support units could be remunerated for the continuing training activities that they organise.

Conclusion

In conclusion, without a more favourable environment for business growth and job creation, Tunisia's human capital potential is likely to remain underutilised. There is a wide national consensus that the further integration of Tunisia into global value chains could help generate activities with a higher added value and jobs for a more highly qualified workforce. Policies are needed to adjust the business environment and modernise enterprises to help them grow. At the same time, more and higher-quality jobs require people with the right professional skills and competences. Vocational skills and qualifications are a key pillar of Tunisia's human capital stock, which is why the upgrading of initial and continuing VET deserves more political attention.

Addressing the above-described challenges and recommendations in a sustained, systematic manner can have an impact in the mid to long term on the efficiency and effectiveness of the initial and continuing VET system. It will improve the relevance and quality of its outcomes in terms of employable skills of young and adult people. It will help make better use of public, private and donor investments. Including more people in skills development schemes, preventing early dropouts and equipping workers with relevant labour market skills will strengthen Tunisia's human resource potential, improve the school-to-work transition and contribute to the country's goals of economic development and labour market and social inclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About this assessment

This ETF assessment report on Human Capital Development in Tunisia forms part of the fifth round of the ETF Torino Process. Tunisia has been taking part in this process since 2010. Prior to this assessment, a series of self-assessments took place in Tunisia from 2018 to 2020. The Observatoire National de l'Emploi et des Qualifications (ONEQ: National Observatory for Employment and Qualifications) acted as the national coordinating body, bringing together VET stakeholders both at national and sub-national levels. As a result, a draft national Torino Process report 2020 (Zaibi, on behalf of MFPE and ONEQ, *publication upcoming*) and eight regional Torino Process reports⁴ were produced, the latter in close cooperation with the EU-funded IRADA programme.

The ETF assessment process included an extensive phase of desk research based on the national and regional reports, a literature review of relevant studies, gathering of statistical data and the preparation of an issue paper containing an overview of themes to be discussed in the present report.

Within the regional policy dialogue, the findings and recommendations of the ETF Torino Process assessment provide elements to inform future regional initiatives within the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean area, as well as the ongoing discussions on post-2020 programming. The findings of this report will also feed into the current dialogue, led by the Union for the Mediterranean and the European Commission, on monitoring the progress of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour that underlines a range of issues, including the importance of reforming education and training systems in a way that responds to the challenges presented by ensuring employment, employability, and decent work.⁵ A cross-country report will consolidate all the outcomes from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Torino Process assessments and will contribute to the monitoring and evaluation framework intended to be developed as a concrete output of the Declaration.⁶

The present assessment takes a broader perspective on human capital development in a lifelong learning perspective. After introducing the wider context (chapter 1), the assessment provides an overview of the key human capital development challenges in Tunisia (chapter 2). Chapter 3 concentrates on the VET system, as Tunisian employers demand skilled workers and technicians, and VET graduates stand better chances on the labour market. It elaborates on the two major challenges of external and internal consistency of the VET system and suggests recommendations for how these could be improved in the mid to long term. Chapter 4 provides a conclusion.

⁴ One report for each region participating in the IRADA programme (<http://irada.com.tn/>), namely Gabès, Médenine, Gafsa, Kasserine, Sfax, Sidi Bouzid, Bizerte and Jendouba.

⁵ For the importance of investment in education, higher education and training systems, including VET, as well as lifelong reskilling and upskilling of workers to prepare them for constant changes in the world of work, see Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour, April 2019, p. 4.

⁶ The labour ministers asked the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat to coordinate, with the contribution of volunteering countries, the setting up of a framework for national monitoring processes, notably by organising meetings, providing relevant information, contact making and networking, as well as cooperating with countries' stakeholders and international organisations. The ministers invited the European Commission and the relevant EU agencies, in particular the ETF, to provide relevant expertise to this work. See the Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour, paragraph 29, April 2019.

1.2 Country overview

In Tunisia in 2011, thousands took to the streets amid frustration of poverty, joblessness and corruption. Millions of people hoped it would inspire change in Tunisia. Since then, the country has been successfully undertaking a democratic transition of its policies and institutions. A new constitution was adopted in 2014 (JORT, 2015). However, challenges stemming from the dire socio-economic situation, as well as 'security concerns related to violent extremism and terrorism' now risk overshadowing the significant progress achieved so far (Colombo and Meddeb, 2018, p. 35).

Tunisia has a young population, with 39% being under 25 years of age in 2018 (Eurostat, 2020, p. 19). Developing a meaningful career path for these young men and women and allowing them to engage in gainful economic activity is a major concern for Tunisia. A weak economy hampers people's participation in the labour market and leads to rising unemployment, informal sector jobs and migration, which affects young people disproportionately (UNECA, 2019). In view of the high unemployment levels, more than 100 000 young people have left Tunisia since the revolution.

In terms of human development, Tunisia ranked 95th out of 189 countries in the UNDP Human Development Index 2017, qualifying as a country with 'high human development'. Since the Arab Spring, socio-economic conditions have improved, although the perception among the population may be different, as prices of products and services have gone up, unlike their salaries. Progress has been made in terms of access to health and social services, as noted in the voluntary national report on progress vis-à-vis the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, 2019). However, despite the emphasis on social policies, 3.8% of the Tunisian population fall into the category of extremely poor people (MDICI, 2017). In addition, major disparities remain between the regions in the north of the country and along the coast on the one hand and the interior and rural regions on the other.

Tunisia is one of the Arab countries at the forefront of acknowledging women's rights. Recent initiatives include a new law on gender mainstreaming in institutions (Dahmani, 2018). However, Tunisian women continue to suffer from discrimination, both socially and in terms of their labour market integration, despite women often having higher levels of education.

1.3 National strategy frameworks

Tunisia has adopted a number of ambitious reform strategies. The overarching strategy is the National Development Plan 2016–2020 (MDICI, 2017).

Responsibilities for the different subsystems of education in Tunisia are distributed over three ministries – the Ministère de l'Éducation, the MESRS and the MJSIP. The latter has recently taken over responsibility for VET and employment, previously under the MFPE.⁷ Each ministry has analysed key problems and defined appropriate measures for their subsectors. They receive state funding to implement actions that emerged from the National Development Plan 2016–2020 (MDICI, 2017). The plan highlights the need for cooperation between the three ministries with a view to coordinating and mutually reinforcing initiatives within the context of lifelong learning. A new commission for human

⁷ The technocratic government, which was being negotiated at the time of writing in September 2020, did not foresee an MFPE but rather a secretariat dealing with '*insertion professionnelle*', which operates under the MJSIP. However, this government is expected to be in place for a temporary period only.

capital development, composed of representatives from all three ministries, has been set up. However, its effectiveness is yet to be seen (see also Section 3.1).

Faced with deteriorating levels of skills and high unemployment among young graduates, the government is looking to overhaul the general education and VET systems with a series of reform measures. The aim of the Strategic Plan for the Education Sector 2016–2020 (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2016) is to increase quality through improved teacher training, upgraded curricula and infrastructure, and a new framework for private partnerships. Reforms are expected to address the major challenges at both basic and secondary levels, which include high dropout rates, a lack of infrastructure, and low-quality teaching. For VET, the MFPE, in collaboration with the social partners, designed an ambitious National VET Reform Strategy 2016–2020, which incorporates 14 major projects (see Section 2.5.2 for further details).

Public institutions have taken ownership of these strategies. However, the pace of taking concrete actions has remained slow, despite substantial funding support from the EU and other donors. Frequent changes of governments and their political agendas present serious barriers for the Tunisian administration to push forward reforms in a consistent manner. Also, the new concepts and methodologies, as well as pilots introduced by donors, may have overstretched local capacity for sustaining and mainstreaming reform initiatives. Most strategies are close to their expiry dates, which provides a great opportunity to undertake in-depth evaluations and re-adjust the post-2020 policy priorities.

At higher education level, the Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research 2015–2025 (MESRS and CNR) sets out five main objectives: improve the quality of teaching and the employability of graduates; promote research and innovation; foster good governance and optimise resource management; review university planning to ensure a better regional balance; and develop teacher training.

Furthermore, in May 2019, the MFPE and the social partners, in collaboration with the ILO, launched discussions for a new National Employment Strategy for the period 2020 to 2030. Prior to that, a first background analysis had been published (ILO, 2018a).

Donors provide great technical and financial contributions to reform. Consultations are organised through so-called 'coordination tables' in different areas. The MFPE increased their donor coordination efforts in 2019 by mapping ongoing support programmes. For donors, there might be an issue of moving from coordination to cooperation – or from exchanging information on their plans and projects to integrating them, for example through joint programming and implementation processes in line with national policy priorities and capacity. Local actors should remain in the driving seat and identify the next steps in the reform process and related funding gaps.

2. HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES

2.1 Economic developments

Tunisia is a lower middle-income country. The country is engaged in a process of integrating into the world economy, such as through Association Agreements with the European Union (EU), the Agadir Agreement, and talks with the World Trade Organization. However, the impact on the country's economy has so far been rather low. Major disparities among the different regions, age and gender groups affect the country's potential for economic growth and employment generation.

Balghouthi (2018) claims that the Tunisian economy suffers from structural dysfunctions, which include inequalities, corruption, deindustrialisation and a prevalence of low value added sectors, such as the export of olive oil or phosphate. The economic development model, which has existed since the 1980s and divides companies into those for exports and those for the internal market, has remained largely unreformed. Framework agreements regulating the working conditions of employees have not been reviewed for the past 20 years. Industry and manufacturing have been declining, accounting for 22.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018, down from 29.8% in 2011. Agriculture accounted for 10.4% of GDP, while services are now the biggest contributor to GDP: 59.2% in 2018 (World Bank, World Development Indicators).

The vast majority of big enterprises remained state-owned, and public administration is looming. Outside the public sector, there is a high level of informality (see also Section 2.3) and a large number of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. They offer no or rather low-skilled jobs and have little capacity to grow and innovate. Job creation has been low, even in periods of sustained growth in pre-COVID-19 times. A favourable macro-economic environment is an essential precondition for generating jobs.

GDP grew at 1.0% in 2019, down from 2.5% in 2018 (INS⁸ and World Bank, World Development Indicators). This is much below the 5% foreseen by the National Development Plan 2016–2020 (MDICI, 2017). According to the Tunisian Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), projections were more optimistic for the GDP growth rates in 2019 (2.7%) and 2020 (3.2%), whereby the recovery of the tourism sector was seen as one of the main drivers.⁹ After the serious dip following the terrorist attack in 2015, the tourism sector had picked up, with 8.3 million tourist arrivals in 2018 and around 9 million in 2019¹⁰ – an increase of 8% over the previous year. By 10 September 2019, revenues from tourism amounted to TND 1.3 billion, which was 46.6% higher than 12 months before¹¹. However, the COVID-19 lockdown cancelled out all gains by ruining the tourist season in 2020.

Tunisia's economy has been severely hit by the COVID-19 outbreak. The authorities took proactive measures to contain the spread of the virus by closing Tunisia's borders, isolating affected individuals

⁸ <http://www.ins.tn/en/front>

⁹ The Tunisian Federation of Hotel Owners questioned national statistics that estimate the sector's contribution to GDP as 4.1%. A recent study by the Tunisian Federation of Hotel Owners estimates it to be 13.8%:

<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/790526/economie/tunisie-tourisme-les-enjeux-derriere-la-bataille-des-chiffres/>

¹⁰ <https://tradingeconomics.com/tunisia/tourist-arrivals#:~:text=Tourist%20Arrivals%20in%20Tunisia%20is,according%20to%20our%20econometric%20models.>

¹¹ <http://tourisminfo.com.tn/2019/09/19/augmentation-des-recettes-de-466/>

and imposing confinement. They also acted quickly to limit the social and economic impact of the pandemic on lower-income households and small and medium-sized firms through a series of emergency response measures. The large tourism sector and exporters who supply the European automotive and textile industries have felt a strong negative impact. An unprecedented contraction of economic activity of 21.6% occurred during the second quarter of 2020 (INS).¹²

More stress is expected to happen as the crisis spreads through the domestic economy. Remittances, which come predominantly from France and Italy, contributed significantly to GDP, amounting to 5.3% in 2019 (World Bank)¹³. Now, migrants' remittances drop due to the economic crisis in Europe. Households have to draw down savings and cut consumption. The World Economic Outlook by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from October 2020 expects GDP to drop by 7% in 2020, the lowest level since Tunisia's independence in 1956 (TAP, 2020b). The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's data is more optimistic, predicting a contraction of GDP in the area of 2.5% (EBRD, 2020). In July 2020, inflation was up by 5.7% over the previous year (INS)¹⁴. Unemployment will rise further, incomes will fall, and import prices will increase. Many businesses face cash flow shortages because of temporary closures and lower revenues from consumption and exports (IMF, 2020).

A survey of 600 enterprises conducted by the Institut Arabe des Chefs d'Entreprises (IACE) in April 2020 showed that 47% of the companies had to stop their activities due to the pandemic. The building and construction sector and trade were hit especially hard. SMEs were affected, with 46% declaring that they cut back on jobs (as opposed to 17% of the larger companies) (IACE, 2020b). A survey from March 2020 revealed that 96% of the interviewed companies estimated a downturn in their revenues, resulting in fiscal difficulties, a reduction in employees' working time or redundancies, the deferral of investments or even business closure (IACE, 2020a). Preliminary data suggests that companies located in the south were more affected than elsewhere in the country (CEED, 2020).

In the Ease of Doing Business Index¹⁵, which examines how conducive the business environment is in 190 countries, Tunisia improved to 80th place in 2019 (from 88th in 2018). However, this is still far below the 36th place it held in 2008, which suggests that other countries have made much quicker progress than Tunisia. Slight improvements in this ranking are thanks to Tunisia's efforts to:

- make business start-ups easier by registering them at a one-stop shop;
- register property;
- reduce taxes by not extending the exceptional corporate income tax imposed on companies in 2016; and
- strengthen minority investor protection¹⁶.

However, the latest assessment of Tunisia's performance against the SME Policy Index¹⁷ finds that further efforts are needed to improve the business environment for SMEs (OECD, European Commission and ETF, 2018). According to the Global Competitiveness Index 2019¹⁸, the inefficiency of government bureaucracy, political instability and corruption are three major factors that impact negatively on the business environment. Here, Tunisia ranked 87th out of 140 economies, one place

¹² <http://www.ins.tn/en/front>

¹³ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ <http://www.doingbusiness.org/en/rankings>

¹⁶ <https://www.doingbusiness.org/en/reforms/overview/economy/tunisia>

¹⁷ see: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/sme-policy-index_24136883

¹⁸ <https://countryeconomy.com/government/global-competitiveness-index/tunisia>

down from 2017, and much lower than its 40th place in 2011 (WEF, 2018). Furthermore, the country ranked 73rd out of 180 countries in the 2018 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index¹⁹, one place higher than in 2017.

The National Development Plan 2016–2020 (MDICI, 2017) identifies major infrastructure works and investments in innovation and technology as drivers of growth. Its success depends on the country's capacity to attract investment, which was estimated to amount to EUR 50 billion. The plan intended to create 400 000 jobs, in particular for highly skilled workers, thus presenting an opportunity for VET and higher education²⁰. A recent survey points to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as the sector with some potential for growth and for attracting foreign investments, followed by energy and mining, industry and tourism sectors (Oxford Business Group, 2019).

Since April 2016, the EU and Tunisia have been negotiating the terms of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. A fourth negotiation round took place in May 2019. Discussions cover a wide range of topics, from agriculture to services and sustainable development. The overall objective is to better integrate Tunisia's economy into the EU's Single Market and create new trade and investment opportunities, which should help Tunisia's economic recovery. In addition, Tunisia is expanding its integration in international markets by participating in regional Arab and African networks.

2.2 Demographic development and projections

Tunisia has a population of 11.84 million (September 2020 est.) with a median age of 32.8 years (UN population data). The population keeps growing at an annual rate of 1.06%, which is lower than that of Tunisia's North African and Middle Eastern neighbours. In 2018, the share of young people under the age of 15 was 25% and those aged 15 to 24 accounted for approximately 14% of the total population. The last decade has seen a contraction of the share, especially of young people. In 2008, young people under 15 represented 24.3% and those aged 15 to 24 accounted for 20% of the Tunisian population (Eurostat, 2020, p. 19).

The lack of jobs and poverty have led to considerable levels of both internal and external migration. Tunisia is traditionally a country of emigration, with about 6% of its population living abroad, mainly in Europe (83%). In the eight months between January and August 2020, approximately 6 500 Tunisians emigrated to Italy alone²¹. In recent years, Tunisia has also become a destination for immigration, particularly for Libyans, and a country through which migrants and refugees transit from sub-Saharan Africa to the desired destination of Europe. However, with more stringent immigration rules by EU countries now, they often get stranded in Tunisia (see e.g. Afrikyes, 2020). Exact figures on immigrants are not available, but the Tunisian Ministry of Commerce estimates that the total number of refugees hosted by the country is around 1 million, which is 10% of Tunisia's population. Other sources quote higher numbers, closer to around 1.8 million (Karasapan, 2015).

Following the signing of the Mobility Partnership Agreement with the EU in March 2014, Tunisia developed a National Migration Strategy to comprehensively manage migration issues. Implementation of the strategy is supported by the EU-funded ProGreS project (budget: EUR 12.5 million, launched in March 2019). In addition to supporting strategy implementation, the

¹⁹ <https://www.transparency.org/country/TUN>

²⁰ <https://www.tia.gov.tn/opportunités-investissement>

²¹ https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/08/17/news/immigrazione_lamorgese_e_di_maio_in_tunisia_con_loro_anche_l_ue-264809620/

project intends to enhance job creation and investments by mobilising the Tunisian diaspora, assist with the re-integration of Tunisian return migrants through business incubation, and support the local management of migration. Assessing the skills and recognising qualifications of emigrants and immigrants is believed to facilitate access to the labour market. In addition, there are numerous other national and regional donor-funded projects that address these areas.

2.3 Labour market developments

2.3.1 Trends and challenges

The Tunisian labour market is characterised by a very low and slightly declining annual rate of the active population: 51.3% in 2019 versus 52.5% in 2015 for the age group 15–64 (Eurostat, 2020, p. 38); for the population aged 15+, the rates were 46.9% in 2019 versus 47.1% in 2015 (INS; see Table 1). At the same time, there is a growing share of people with higher education degrees in the active population, especially females (see Table 2). The employment rate (aged 15+) is low, at 39.7% in 2019 (INS), with women generally having fewer employment opportunities than men (see Figure 1). Public sector jobs are scarce and the private sector does not create sufficient jobs to absorb the growing number of young, educated labour market entrants. Jobless growth resulted in an annual deficit of around 19 000 jobs between 2011 and 2017 (ILO, 2018a). Since 2011, there has always been a pool of around 600 000 jobseekers.

With ongoing deindustrialisation, Tunisia's employment structure has been shifting towards the services sector. In 2019, this sector accounted for the largest share of employment (54%), followed by industry (33%) and agriculture (13%) (ILO estimates). Also, there are huge regional differences. Jobs exist mostly in the capital city Tunis and coastal areas, less so in inland regions.

Challenge 1: Activity and employment rates, especially of women and young people, are low, despite increasing levels of education

Despite females' increasing levels of education, their labour market participation remains one of the lowest in the world, although there has been a slight improvement in activity rate over the years (Table 1). In 2019, slightly more than 26.6% of women were economically active, compared to 68% of men. The total activity rate (for those aged 15+) amounted to a low 46.9% in the same year (INS).

TABLE 1: ACTIVITY RATE BY GENDER (% AGED 15+)

	1990	1995	200	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total	45.5	45.6	45.9	46.2	46.5	47.1	47.2	47.0	47.0	46.9
Male	67.9	67.3	67.7	68.0	68.7	68.8	68.5	68.3	68.3	68.0
Female	23.6	24.4	24.5	24.7	28.8	26.0	26.6	26.5	26.6	26.6

Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

Understanding the causes behind female inactivity can help inspire appropriate policies. Cultural norms and traditions do play a role, which could be mitigated through a positive discrimination campaign. The low activity rate of women can also be the cause of the low wages perceived by women, especially those without diplomas, and the too expensive prices of day care centres and nurseries in relation to the standard of living. Other constraints include the lack of job opportunities, lack of safe transport to the place of work, general security concerns, poor employment conditions,

and a lack of regulations concerning maternity leave and kindergarten/childcare facilities (Boughzala, 2019). Addressing these issues could improve the labour market integration of women.

Some changing trends are, however, evident: young women are more present on the labour market than their older peers: 60.4% activity rate for the age group 25–29, compared with 36.4% for those aged 35–39 (Boughzala, 2019). Also, the share of female labour market participants increases with their level of education (Table 2). It is important that such trends are consolidated and that the higher female activity rates translate into more jobs for women and lower levels of female unemployment.

TABLE 2: ACTIVE POPULATION BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND GENDER, 2016–2017

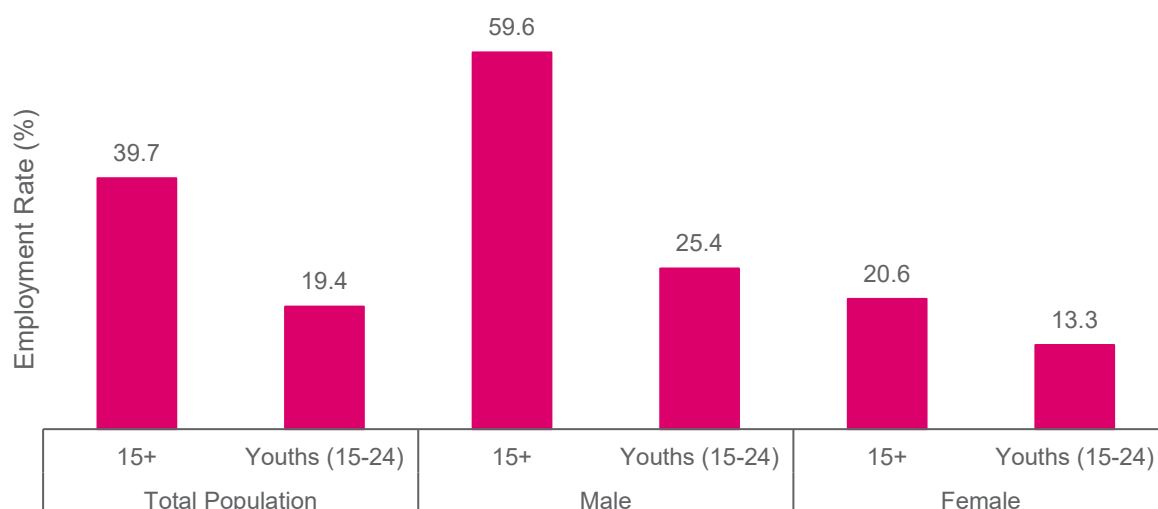
	Illiterate	Elementary	Secondary	Higher	Total1
2016					
Total	7.8%	33.4%	37.4%	21.1%	100%
Male	7.5%	38.3%	39.4%	14.5%	100%
Female	8.6%	21.1%	32.3%	37.7%	100%
2017					
Total	7.7%	32.7%	37.5%	22.1%	100%
Male	7.2%	37.5%	40.4%	14.8%	100%
Female	8.9%	20.9%	30.0%	40.1%	100%

Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

Note¹: Totals may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding issues

The overall employment rate in Tunisia also remains at a relatively low level. In 2019, only 39.7% of the total population was employed. Women generally have fewer employment opportunities than men, with 20.6% of women (15+) employed in 2019 (INS), although the rate does increase for the age group 25–49, at 30% (INS, 2019). This suggests that men get into employment earlier and stay in employment for longer. Young people are particularly vulnerable to being excluded from the labour market, with only one in five being employed (INS, 2019). Apart from demand-side issues, this is due to the mismatch between their skills and qualifications and those required by the market, including the lack of work experience. Also here, there is a major gender divide. For young females (15–24), it is much more difficult to find employment than for their male peers – only 13.3% of females were employed in 2019 (INS).

FIGURE 1: EMPLOYMENT RATE (%) BY AGE AND GENDER, 2019



Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

Challenge 2: Many people work in precarious jobs without decent wages and social protection

Jobs are created in agriculture, manufacturing, construction and service sectors such as tourism and trade. However, many of these jobs are of an informal and/or non-decent nature²². The ILO estimates that 20% of employed Tunisians were in vulnerable employment in 2019, which includes 17% own-account workers (i.e. self-employed people) and 3% contributing family members. This also concerns women who often work in agriculture, the textile industry or trade.

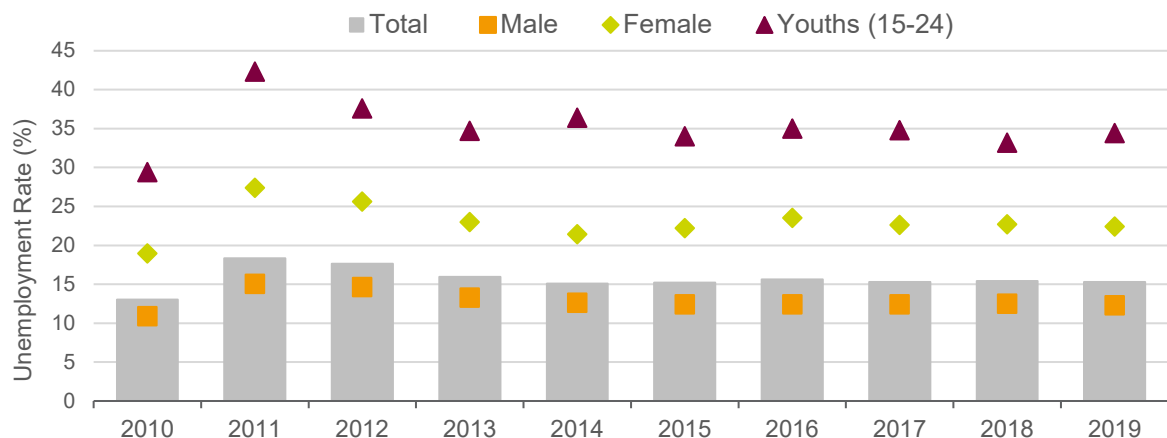
Informality is widespread. According to the (Medina and Schneider, 2018), the informal sector accounted for 30.9% of GDP in 2015, with informality often linked to the size of companies. Informal employment was estimated to account for almost two-thirds of total employment, involving more males and young people. Overall, 84% of the jobs held by young people aged 15 to 19 and 42% by those aged 20 to 24 were informal (ILO, 2018b, using 2014 data). This often implies low-skilled jobs, poor working conditions, low pay and a lack of social protection – and ultimately leads to a devaluation of human capital.

Challenge 3: Unemployment particularly affects young people, especially females and even educated people, pointing to inefficiencies in the development and use of human capital

Unemployment presents a persistent challenge in Tunisia, with slight improvements in recent years: 15.3% in 2019 versus 18.3% in 2011 (INS). The biggest gains were made with regard to the youth unemployment rate (15–24), which decreased from 42.3% in 2011 to 34.4% in 2019. However, unemployment still affects young people and females disproportionately (Figure 2).

²² We refer readers to the ILO's discussion of what decent work is: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

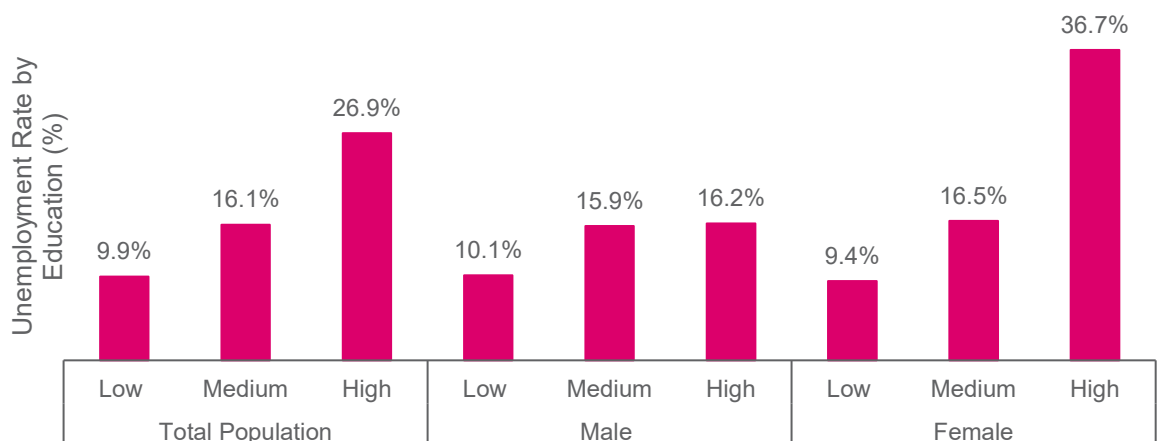
FIGURE 2: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%) BY AGE AND GENDER, 2010–2019



Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

Unemployment also affects people with medium and – even more so – high levels of education, especially females (Figure 3). In view of the low technological level of most MSMEs, employers still prefer to hire semi-skilled or unskilled labour and pay low wages.

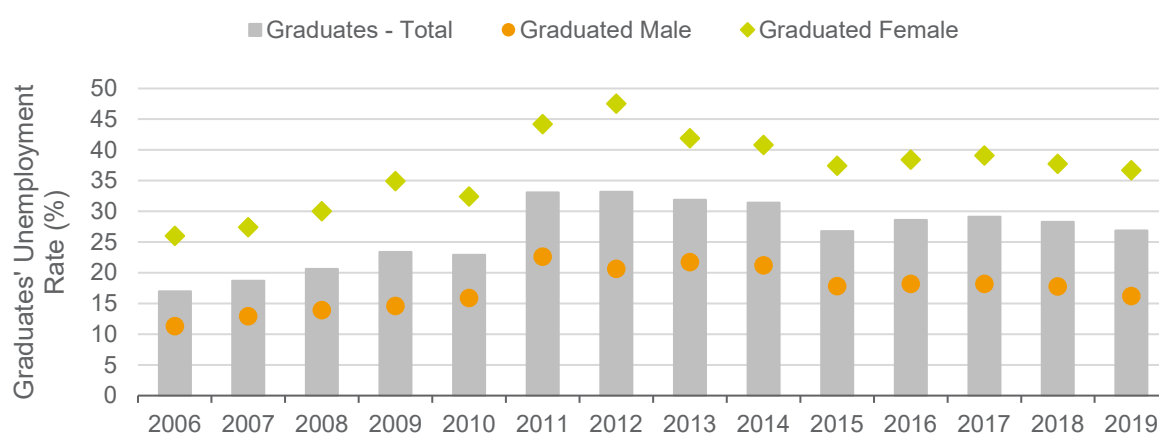
FIGURE 3: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (% AGED 15+) BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND GENDER, 2019



Source ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

In 2019, 36.7% of highly educated women were looking for jobs, compared to 16.2% of their male peers, although there have been major improvements since the unemployment rate for highly educated females peaked in 2012 (Figure 4). The fact that many university graduates are unemployed is particularly alarming, as it suggests problems with the types of studies they pursue, as well as a low return on public and private investments in human capital formation.

FIGURE 4: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES (% AGED 15+) BY GENDER, 2006–2019



Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

Where people reside strongly determines their level of unemployment. Unemployment rates were lowest, at 9.9%, in the centre-east of the country, and highest, at 26.2%, in the southwest (ETF, 2017; ILO, 2018a²³). Geographical factors also determine gender disparities: while differences between young women and men in dynamic urban areas are small, they are much more pronounced in the less dynamic and rural areas. Young women living in the northern, central or interior areas are more vulnerable to unemployment, while those living in southern areas are often completely outside the labour market (Mansuy and Werquin, 2015).

Challenge 4: Young people experience a difficult transition from school to work and one in three young people are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

Young Tunisians generally experience a difficult transition from education to work. In 2019, only 32.2% of young graduates (15–24) had jobs three years after their graduation (INS, 2019). Many first-time jobseekers face unemployment for several months, if not years. The weak business environment, territorial disparities, the lack of relevant basic and technical skills of young people, and weak job information and matching services are all factors that complicate the labour market integration of young people. A slow and difficult transition to the labour market can have a lasting and discouraging impact on the careers, skills and future income of individuals.

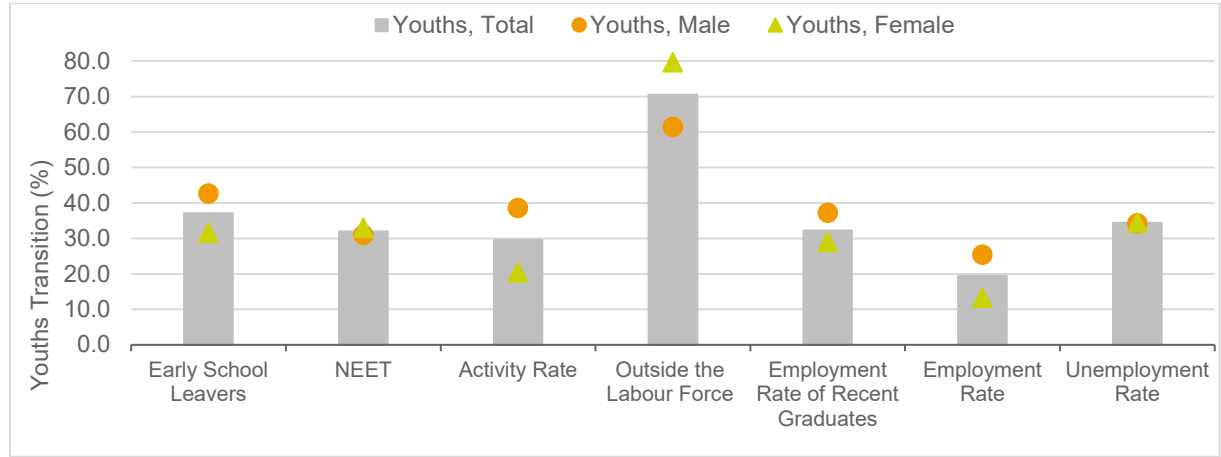
However, tracer studies show that young people who graduated from VET centres have better prospects on the labour market. In 2012, two-thirds of the surveyed individuals were in employment four years after graduation, while 29.7% of all VET graduates were unemployed – although with marked gender differences. Overall, 45.5% of female graduates were unemployed, compared to 21.7% of their male peers (ONEQ, 2017). In the third quarter of 2018, only 22.1% of the surveyed VET graduates cited themselves as unemployed (ONEQ, 2020).

Figure 5 summarises the situation of young people (15–24) on the labour market. What is concerning is the fact that, in 2019, one in three young people aged 15 to 24 (or 32% in total; male rate: 31.0%; female rate: 33.0%, INS) who did not complete secondary education were NEETs. In 2019, 79.6% of

²³ INS data for 2016 quoted in ETF (2017) but largely confirmed by INS data for the second quarter of 2017, as used in ILO (2018).

females aged 15 to 24 and 61.4% of males were inactive (total: 70.5%). Only 29.0% of recent female graduates and 37.2% of male graduates were employed (total: 32.2%). One in three young persons (or 34.4%) are unemployed (female rate: 34.5%) (all data for age group 15–24; INS, 2019).

Figure 5: Youths transition (% aged 15–24), 2019

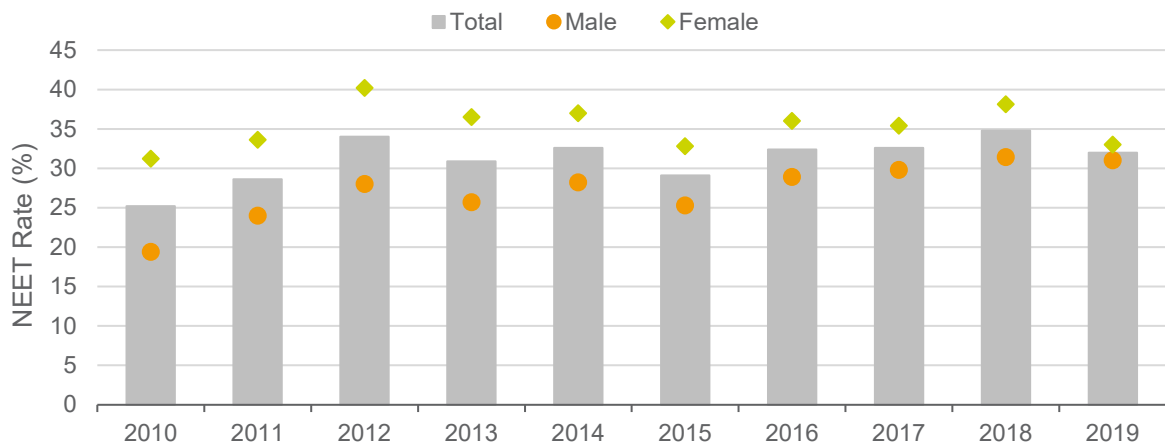


Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

Note: Early school leavers as % aged 18–24. Employment rate of recent graduates as % aged 20–34 who achieved International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 3 to 8.

Trend data does not show major improvements in the total NEETs rate. This rate has traditionally been higher for females, which can be attributed to the lack of suitable, safe education and job opportunities, but also cultural norms and traditions, family obligations and other reasons. However, Figure 6 illustrates that, in 2019, females have been able to considerably narrow the gap with males, with their NEETs rate improving by 5.1 percentage points over the previous year.

FIGURE 6: YOUTH NEETS (% AGED 15 TO 24), 2010–2019



Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

Challenge 5: Skills mismatches point to an inefficient use of human capital

Closely linked to the above are the existing skills mismatches of the workforce. High unemployment coexists with a high number of unfilled job vacancies, as studies have shown (e.g. ITCEQ, 2018). Three out of four enterprises reported difficulties in finding candidates suitably qualified to fill available

vacancies (ITCEQ, 2018). It is skilled workers and specialised technicians who are being sought, particularly in the textile, hotel and catering, and ICT sectors. Medium- and high-skilled profiles are also particularly affected by the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon (migration of highly skilled people).

An oversupply of university graduates may suggest a considerable degree of over-qualification, as highly educated young people may be forced to accept positions that require less education. However, convincing evidence of over-qualification is lacking. A school-to-work transition survey asked young people whether they feel over-qualified: 75% answered that their education or training was useful or appropriate for carrying out their current job, while only 28% considered themselves over-qualified. Furthermore, 5% mentioned gaps in knowledge and skills (OECD, 2015b). Another report (ILO, 2016) found that 16.1% of young people were over-qualified for the jobs they were doing. One possible explanation for this might be the quality of education and the fact that the actual skills possessed by young people do not adequately reflect their level of education.

On the other hand, as many as one-third of the young people surveyed by the ILO (2016) were underqualified for their jobs (33.3%), which raises issues in relation to work productivity and the quality of products and services offered.

The pertinent skills mismatch on the Tunisian labour market, in its multiple dimensions, continues to hamper further economic development and a more efficient use of human capital. Young people with a higher education degree aim to get a safe, better-paid public sector job. In 2016 as many as 650 000 people were employed in the public sector, or 24% of the total labour force (IMF). Now such hopes are fading, as the public sector’s capacity to absorb new people has reached its limit (MDICI and UNDP, 2017).

Some initiatives have been taken to employ young graduates. This includes the Tunisie Digitale 2020 plan which aims to develop ICT infrastructure throughout the country and services linked to ICTs. A study by the Institut Tunisien de la Compétitivité et des Etudes Quantitatives (ITCEQ – Tunisian Institute of Competitiveness and Quantitative Studies) argues that the most knowledge-intensive sectors are the pharmaceutical industry, financial activities, telecommunications, IT, paper and cardboard industry, mechanical and electrical industries, chemical industry, as well as health and business services. The share of these sectors in value added activities was increasing some years ago, reaching 17% in 2012 (ILO, 2018a).

The dramatic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to further aggravate existing economic and labour market challenges. With a view to containing the state budget, the Tunisian government announced the freezing of public sector recruitment, except for some priority occupations (TAP, 2020a). The UNDP (2020) estimates that the recession could put at stake as many as 275 000 jobs in micro and small businesses, while unemployment could rise to 21.6%. In the second quarter of 2020, unemployment stood at 18% (INS).²⁴ People, especially in disadvantaged regions, could give up searching for a job and become further alienated from the labour market. All this could lead to a further underutilisation of existing human capital. Furthermore, with 470 000 people potentially falling below the poverty line and a carefully estimated poverty rate of 19%, Tunisia could be thrown some 15 years back in development (UNDP, 2020).

²⁴ <http://www.ins.tn/en/themes/emploi#1909>

2.3.2 Employment policy and public employment service

The MFPE is in charge of strategies and policies for employment. In December 2012, it adopted the National Employment Strategy 2013–2017, which was implemented only to a limited extent. Discussions were relaunched in 2017 and an analytical background study published in 2018 to inform a new employment strategy (ILO, 2018a). In May 2019, the MFPE and relevant departments of other ministries, together with the main employers' union (Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts) and the federation of trade unions (Tunisian General Labour Union), started to draft the new employment strategy for 2020 to 2030 with support from the ILO. It will focus on three main pillars: (i) employment creation, (ii) employability and skills supply, and (iii) labour market governance. At the time of writing this report, the final draft of the strategy was in the process of consultations with the social actors. It remains to be seen how well the two MFPE departments of Employment and VET collaborate and integrate the objectives and measures from the emerging employment strategy with those resulting from the VET strategy.

In March 2021, the Ministry in charge of employment (MJSIP) and the concerned departments in other Ministry, in cooperation with employers and workers representatives and with the support of the ILO, have finalised the drafting of the National Strategy of international employment and of the protection of the rights of labour migrants (Stratégie nationale de l'emploi à l'international et de la protection des droits des travailleurs migrants (SNEI)), which integrates the National Employment Strategy (SNE). It articulates with a dedicated operational plan. The SNEI will also provide for a reference and orientation framework together with other national and policies linked to international employment and labour migrants' rights.

This new prism places the international employment sector not only as a complement to the regulatory system of the national labor market, but it considers it in relation to future developments in the economic dynamics, jobs and training. The SNEI also draws on the opportunities offered by Tunisia's membership in international cooperation frameworks aimed at promoting safe, orderly and regular migration routes and where decent employment, the reduction of inequalities between workers, and fairness in recruitment should be the main targets promoted and favoured by the international community. The objectives of the strategy include (i) the adoption of a global logic of international cooperation in the field of migration, led by a clear and coordinated vision covering all the forms, ways and setors associated to labour migration and respecting the Tunisian regional and international commitments and norms regulating international labour. (ii) translating the regional membership of Tunisia to regional clusters and its orientations, international and economic partnerships (iii) providing the productive system with the national and international skills necessary for the development of the country, while guaranteeing them the conditions for their professional, economic and social development. (iv) the provision of a training system, initial and continuing, adapted to the needs of the national and international labor market, open to the different phases of the migration process and in harmony with international standards. (v) strengthening the securing of the channels of organized, existing and potential labor migration in both directions, and combating irregular migration.

The SNEI is articulated around 5 axes :

Axe 1: An efficient governance of international labour market

Axe 2: An information and monitoring system integrating the evolving requirements of the national and international labor markets, as well as those of international cooperation, allowing optimal management of international employment,

Axe 3: A training system structuring human capital, adapted to the needs of the international labor market and to the different phases of the migration process,

Axe 4: An effective international intermediation and placement system,

Axe 5: A strategy at the service of the country's economic and social development.

With the creation of the National Council for Social Dialogue in November 2018, the tripartite dialogue was institutionalised, for which provisions were made in the Social Pact (*Contrat Social*) agreed between the state, the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, Tunisian General Labour Union and the Agriculture and Fisheries Union in 2013. However, social partners do not yet act as equal partners with government. They often only get involved when decisions about labour or VET budgets or policies have already been taken.

The National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment (ANETI – Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi et le Travail Indépendant), as the executive agency of the MFPE, is the body in charge of implementing public employment policies. ANETI's mission is fairly broad, ranging from managing active labour market policies (ALMPs) to supporting self-employment and entrepreneurship. However, despite this plethora of tasks, resources assigned to ANETI are very limited, which hampers its role as a fully functioning public employment service.

Tunisia has a tradition of ALMPs that can be classified into four main categories:

1. training;
2. employment subsidies;
3. support to the transition from school to work and from job to job; and
4. entrepreneurship support.

Within the framework of reforms of active labour market programmes, a new decree was adopted, nr 542 of 28 May 2019, and replaced decree nr 2369 of 16 October 2012. The new decree stipulates and regulates the programmes of the National Employment Funds, its conditions and modalities as follows:

- Three programs intended for all categories of job seekers are made available to companies and associations allowing them to benefit from a number of advantages, namely:
 - CIVP Contract of initiation to professional life;
 - Karama « DIGNITE » contract (see below)
 - Civil service contract;
- Entrepreneurship promotion programme,
- Job seekers accompanying programme « Forsati »,
- Training and retraining programme to respond to the needs of enterprises and to unavailable skills and qualifications.

Between 2012 and 2017, the number of beneficiaries of ANETI programmes increased by a remarkable 44%, reaching 182 000 in 2017. The Forsati programme ended in early 2018 and was then relaunched in 2019, not without debate.²⁵

²⁵ See HuffPost article contained in: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-abidjan/---ilo-algiers/documents/pressrelease/wcms_713349.pdf, page 5.

Despite the lack of a systematic monitoring and evaluation system, it is generally agreed that ALMPs in Tunisia have had some positive impact, especially on young people. ALMPs have provided opportunities for first-time jobseekers and young people with business ideas. Yet, it is also acknowledged that, in view of the huge public investments, outcomes in terms of placements and improved employability of beneficiaries could have been better (ILO, 2018a).

The main shortcomings of ALMPs in Tunisia include both their targeting and their geographical distribution. ALMPs are aimed mainly at higher education graduates, while only a few programmes and services assist low-skilled and disadvantaged individuals. In addition, programmes are more easily accessible in Tunis and the coastal regions. The interior regions are less well covered such that the number of ALMP beneficiaries among the long-term unemployed and low-skilled people remains low. Given that there is no unemployment insurance, this has resulted in a strong imbalance: resources have de facto been distributed unequally between different groups (e.g. women holding secondary or higher education degrees versus women without formal qualifications) and between different regions, which exacerbates existing dichotomies. Furthermore, specific measures to support entrepreneurship and start-ups have proven to be expensive but not very effective. Measures included 3% of young unemployed people, but only 1% managed to breathe life into their project ideas (ETF, 2019a).

2.4 Education: Budget, access, participation and quality

Human capital development and equality for men and women have traditionally been high on the agenda of the Tunisian government. Similar to pre-revolution levels, public expenditure on education remains high, accounting for 6.1% of GDP in 2017 (INS²⁶), or 21.1% of the total public expenditure (UNESCO Institute for Statistics – UIS). These figures are above EU and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) averages.

The Tunisian education system, including VET, is predominantly public and includes grants that allow for access to education at all levels. However, recent years have seen an expansion of private provision, especially at university level. It is marketed as offering better job opportunities. Private VET centres have a long tradition and provide courses mainly in fields related to business management.

Challenge 6: Educational attainment rates are improving but the quality of education including basic skills levels are of major concern

As Table 3 shows, gross enrolment ratios²⁷ are high, with 115.4% attending primary level in 2018, which represents a steady increase from 104.8% in 2008. Overall, 93% were enrolled in secondary education (2016), and 31.7% continued on to tertiary level in 2018 (UIS).

²⁶ This percentage equals the sum of the budgets by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (as % of GDP).

²⁷ Gross enrolment ratios are calculated as the total enrolment at each level of education regardless of age, and are expressed as a percentage of the corresponding official education age. The ratio can exceed 100% due to the inclusion of over-aged and under-aged students, because of early or late school entrance or grade repetition.

TABLE 3: GROSS ENROLMENT RATIOS BY EDUCATION LEVEL AND GENDER, 2008–2018 (IN %)

		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Primary	Total	104.8	105.4	107.2	107.8	109.9	111.4	113.3	114.6	114.9	115.6	115.4
	Female	104.1	105.1	107.0	107.7	110.2	111.3	113.4	114.6	115.1	115.4	114.9
	Male	105.4	105.6	107.4	107.9	109.6	111.5	113.3	114.5	114.8	115.9	115.9
Secondary	Total	92.4	90.6	90.2	91.8	–	90.1	87.7	88.2	92.9	–	–
	Female	96.8	94.9	94.5	95.3	–	–	–	–	99.3	–	–
	Male	88.3	86.6	86.2	88.6	–	–	–	–	86.9	–	–
Tertiary	Total	33.7	35.0	35.4	35.2	35.9	35.0	35.3	35.2	32.8	32.1	31.7
	Female	40.3	42.2	43.2	43.8	44.0	43.2	44.1	44.1	41.8	41.7	41.2
	Male	27.4	28.0	27.8	26.8	28.0	27.0	26.8	26.6	24.2	23.1	22.8

Source: UIS database.

Note: “–” denotes missing information

Tunisia has managed to greatly improve its schooling and literacy rates over the years. The illiteracy rate fell to 19.0% in 2015 (down from 31.7% in 1994) (MDICI, 2016). Youth literacy rates (15–24 age group) climbed to 96.8%. Literacy rates for the adult population (25–65 age group) demonstrate a large gender gap of 15% (88.3% of males versus 73.8% of females), but the 15- to 24-year-olds managed to close this gender gap, reducing it to merely 1%.

Furthermore, the overall educational attainment of the population (aged 15+ years) also shows a clear upward trend (Table 4). Although medium-level qualifications, including VET, remained stagnant at 20.5% in 2019 (down from 21.5% in 2010), the higher education segment improved from 12.6% in 2010 to 16.4% in 2019, with a considerable portion of such degrees in the social or religious studies rather than in sought-after technical fields. The share of low-educated individuals decreased slightly to 63.0% in 2019, compared to 66.0% in 2010. Women made bigger gains: while there used to be a 5.5% difference between men and women with a lower educational background in 2010, this had reduced to only 1.4% in 2019. Equally, the share of women with high levels of education in 2019 outweighed men by far, with a further widening of the gap since 2015 (18.1% vs. 14.6%) (INS).

TABLE 4: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF TOTAL POPULATION BY GENDER (% AGED 15), 2010 AND 2015–2019

Education level	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total						
Low	66.0	64.6	64.9	64.5	64.1	63.0
Medium	21.5	20.7	19.9	19.9	19.6	20.5
High	12.6	14.7	15.1	15.6	16.2	16.4
Males						

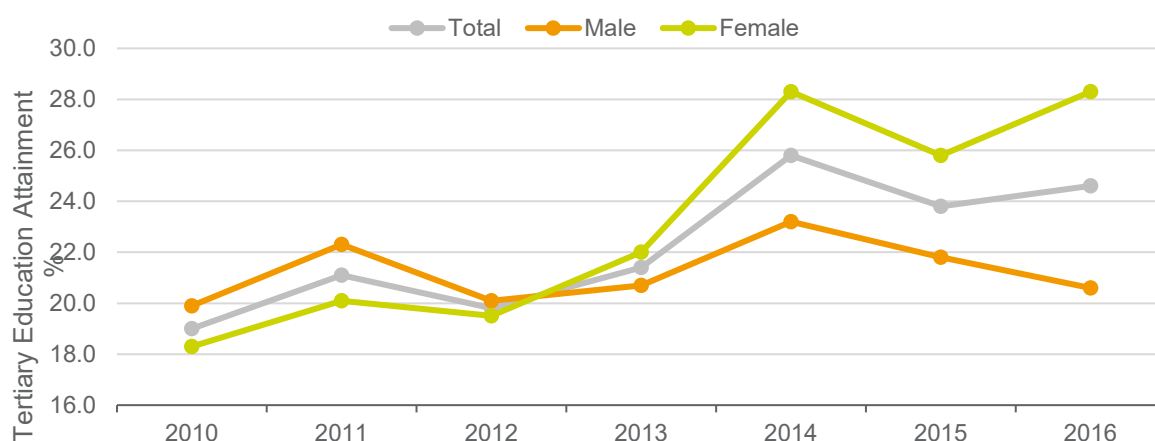
Education level	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Low	63.2	62.8	64.0	63.7	63.7	62.3
Medium	23.6	22.4	22.0	22.3	21.9	22.9
High	13.3	14.8	14.0	13.9	14.5	14.6
Females						
Low	68.7	66.4	65.9	65.2	64.6	63.7
Medium	19.4	19.0	17.9	17.5	17.5	18.2
High	11.9	14.6	16.2	17.2	17.9	18.1

Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

Notes: low: ISCED 0–2 (includes no schooling); medium: ISCED 3–4; high: ISCED 5–6 (ISCED 97 classification).

About one-quarter of the population aged 30–34 had successfully completed higher education (24.6% in 2016, up from 19.0% in 2010). Young females with higher education degrees outnumber their male counterparts: 28.6% versus 20.6% in 2016 (INS; see Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: HIGHER EDUCATION ATTAINMENT (% AGED 30–34), 2010–2016



Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

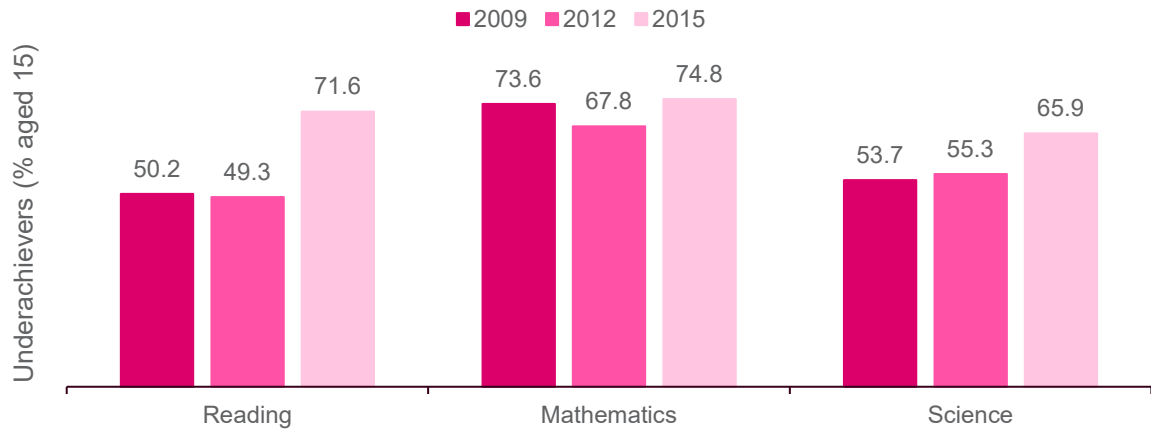
However, these positive trends stand in sharp contrast to the persistently high rate for early school leavers, i.e. leaving before completing a secondary education degree. Despite major improvements compared to 2010 when the rate totalled 54.9%, early school leaving still affected 37.1% of people aged 18–24 in 2019 (INS). At a rate of 42.6% in 2019 (down from 54.9% in 2010), more young males dropped out of school than young females (rates for females were 31.6% in 2019, down from 47.7% in 2010) (see Figure 5). Dropout rates in Tunisia remain high amid continuous security concerns and a lack of appropriate programmes, facilities, transport, and pedagogical and family support. There is a close link to the NEETs rate, as discussed earlier (see Figure 6).

Another area of concern is the low quality of education in Tunisia, including poor basic skills levels. In 2017, the expected years of schooling amounted to 10.2 years, but the learning-adjusted years of schooling corresponded to only 6.3 years (World Bank, Human Development Index).

As Figure 8 illustrates, the 2015 results from the OECD’s PISA showed a sharp decline in reading skills: as many as 71.6% of students aged 15 were low performers in 2015, which compares

unfavourably to Tunisia's 50.2% in 2009 and the EU average of 19.7% in 2015. Under-achievement in science increased to 65.9% in 2015 (53.7% in 2009) and in mathematics to 74.8% (73.6% in 2009). Average EU rates in 2015 amounted to 20.6% and 22.2%, respectively.

FIGURE 8: UNDERACHIEVERS (% AGED 15) FAILING LEVEL 2 ON PISA SCALE, 2009, 2012 AND 2015



Source: OECD, PISA

Reasons include the poor conditions in schools, especially in disadvantaged regions, but also curricula and teacher skills (ETF, 2019a). This is serious because poor basic skills prevent young people from further learning and from acquiring higher-level vocational skills. Thus, a declining quality in primary and lower secondary education contributes to higher levels of exclusion from education and the labour market. Low-skilled young people are also more vulnerable to changing economic conditions, as has been seen with the COVID-19 crisis.

2.5 Vocational education and training

VET presents a specific subsector within the overall education system, which is now under the jurisdiction of the MJSIP. In addition, several sector ministries and agencies are involved, which makes VET management complex and system reform difficult (see Section 3.1 for further details). Training centres report to different ministries, i.e. 136 training centres report to the MJSIP, 8 to the Ministry of Tourism, 39 to the Ministry of Agriculture, 18 to the Ministry of Health and 12 belong to the Tunisian Army. This includes a number of sector-specific training centres with a national mandate, which are sometimes situated in distant locations. In addition, numerous private training centres operate in Tunisia in a largely unregulated market. The ILO refers to over 2 700 such centres, while ONEQ quoted 189 accredited and 935 non-accredited centres for the academic year 2016/17 (ONEQ, 2016).

Individual VET programmes differ by content, place of delivery and duration, and lead to different levels of qualifications. They include: *Brevet de Technicien Professionnel* (BTP: Professional Technician Certificate), *Brevet de Technicien Supérieurs* (BTS: Higher Technician Certificate), *Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle* (CAP) and *Certificat de Compétence* (CC).

2.5.1 Access and participation

Challenge 7: VET enrolment numbers are low due to the lack of attractive VET offers and missing pathways to higher education

The share of VET students in secondary education in Tunisia was low, at 9.1%, in 2016, a decrease from 13.9% in 2011. This testifies to a lack of attractive VET offers, which is the case especially for girls (6.5%) (see Table 5).

TABLE 5: STUDENTS ENROLLED IN VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AS A PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION, 2011, 2013–2016

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total secondary vocational students (as % of total secondary education students)	Total	13.9	–	9.3	6.1	6.2	9.1
	Female	9.1	–	–	–	–	6.5
	Male	18.8	–	–	–	–	11.8
Lower secondary vocational students (as % of lower secondary education students)	Total	17.3	–	9.0	2.6	2.5	8.5
	Female	12.6	–	8.4	1.1	1.0	6.8
	Male	21.3	–	9.5	4.0	3.9	10.2
Upper secondary vocational students (as % of upper secondary pupils)	Total	10.6	–	9.6	9.3	9.6	9.6
	Female	5.9	–	–	–	–	6.2
	Male	15.9	–	–	–	–	13.7

Source: UIS database

Note: “–” denotes missing information

The problem of the low number of enrolments in VET programmes is exacerbated by the fact that one in five young people drop out from VET (see Section 3.1). VET is seen as the second choice at secondary level and as generally leading to jobs with low social status and pay. In addition, its low attractiveness is attributed to the fact that VET presents a dead-end street, despite previous attempts to create pathways into higher education. Furthermore, rising security concerns after the revolution explain part of the declining enrolment numbers, especially of girls.

2.5.2 Quality and relevance

Back in 2013, the MFPE carried out a thorough self-assessment to identify the weaknesses of the VET system. The weaknesses included the lack of harmonisation in terms of system management, the absence of a clear direction for reform, and the overall weak capacity of the VET system to adapt to the needs of the economy, individuals and society. Missing instruments to identify skills and training needs and translate them into relevant VET offers were acknowledged as key shortcomings.

Recognising these challenges, the MFPE launched an ambitious VET reform strategy for the period 2014–2018, now extended to 2020²⁸ (MFPE, 2013). It built on the Social Pact and the lessons learned from the earlier MANFORME²⁹ and PEFESE³⁰ programmes, (co-)funded by the EU.

The VET reform strategy aims to achieve the following main objectives:

- increase the attractiveness of VET;
- support the professional development of trainers;
- involve regional stakeholders;
- improve data collection and analysis, and enhance the monitoring and evaluation function; and
- develop entrepreneurial mind-sets across the VET system.

The strategy clusters reform measures under 14 different VET reform projects, each with their specific objectives, action plans, and the human and financial resources required. The estimated total costs of the 14 projects amounted to TND 428 million (ca. EUR 132 million), including TND 369 million (ca. EUR 114 million) alone for the restructuring and modernisation of training centres (project 8).

The Tunisian authorities have taken ownership of VET reform, and social partners provide some support. However, human and material resources are limited and ministers have changed frequently, which more often than not has led to an introduction of new policy priorities. This in turn has diverted some resources from the implementation of the 14 VET projects, as well as creating some fatigue among administrative staff and reform actors. Thus, VET reform, according to its original goals, has been advancing only at a slow pace. Some of the many axes of reform have practically stalled such that the VET system is not currently functioning effectively.

Donors provide major resources and technical assistance to design concepts and methodologies and implement VET reform in restricted areas or pilot institutions. They contribute to the capacity-building of policy-makers and social partners and most of the projects to date, but this is not enough to make the system work differently. National capacity is limited, and at times donors act in an uncoordinated manner.

Areas where progress was achieved include the formalisation of the tripartite social dialogue for VET and employment, the existence of a training levy system (although its functioning requires improvement), and the regulation of WBL.

In line with the constitution adopted in 2014, VET functions are to be decentralised to regional and local levels. This is an innovative approach that could help improve both the quality and relevance of VET supply at local level and the employability of young people. Already in its 2016–2017 edition of the Torino Process, the ETF (2017) saw the urgent need for a new VET governance model as part of overall VET system reforms, which would involve the social partners and regional and local authorities to a much greater degree. Government decree no. 2019-802 adopted on 15 August 2019 assigns, in principle, a somewhat higher autonomy to VET centres. It encourages VET centres to set up so-called

²⁸ The VET reform strategy period 2014–2018 was re-labelled 2016–2020 to coincide with the implementation period of the National Development Strategy 2016–2020.

²⁹ A synthesis of the three phases of the MANFORME project is provided here: http://adapt.it/adapt-indice-a-z/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/difid-wb_knowledge_skills_Tunisia_2003.pdf

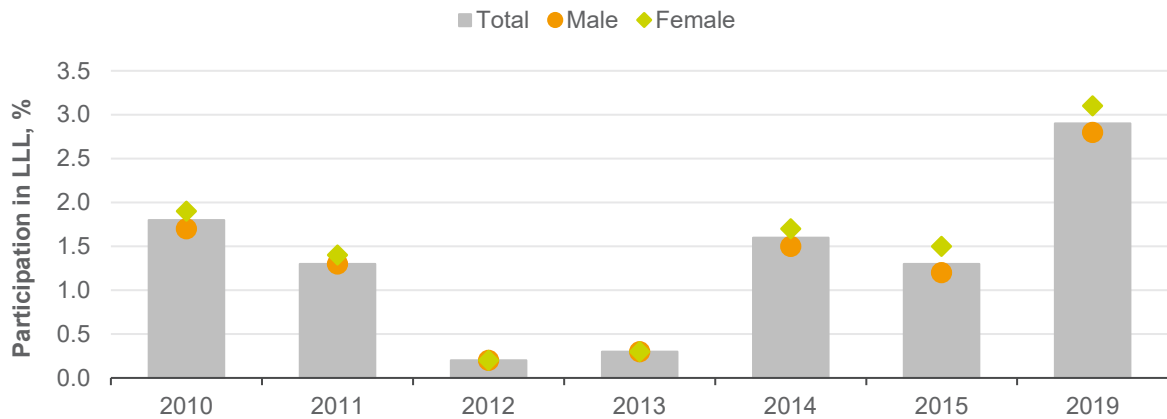
³⁰ An EU Budget Support programme, which supported education.

'partnership committees'. However, autonomy may not go far enough and implementation modalities are still to be worked out. We will discuss further the issue of decentralisation in Section 3.1.

Challenge 8: Opportunities for continuing VET are underutilised

There is a demand for continuous education, skills upgrading and retraining. Of the active population aged 25 to 64, 2.9% participated in training in 2019, a significant increase from 1.3% in 2015 (INS, LFS; see Figure 9). However, despite structural reforms and the existence of a training levy system in Tunisia, comprehensive policies for continuing VET are lacking and the system remains weak. Red tape (bureaucracy) and complex application processes are the main reasons for the fact that the training fund remained underutilised for continuing VET, with only 10% of the available funds used in 2016 (ILO, MFPE and CNFCPP, 2017). Discussions are underway on how to simplify the use of fund mechanisms to improve access to lifelong learning.

FIGURE 9: PARTICIPATION IN ADULT TRAINING (% AGED 25–64), 2010–2015 AND 2019



Source: ETF Database, data received from INS, LFS

3. ASSESSMENT OF KEY ISSUES AND POLICY RESPONSES

Human capital development can be the cornerstone of inclusive growth, driving both productivity and employment. Tunisia has greatly improved the literacy and educational attainment rates of its population. Many of Tunisia's young people are educated, including a considerable number of people who have obtained higher education degrees. However, alongside the general lack of jobs, the low quality of education at all levels, including of basic skills and vocational training, is one of the reasons for the high youth unemployment and NEETs rate in Tunisia.

The education system is based on a meritocratic system that selects the best candidates and leaves the majority of young people to pursue studies in fields with scant employment prospects (OECD, 2018). More than one-third of young people still leave education before completing a secondary-level qualification (see Figure 5). Attractive, high-quality VET is lacking that would train the skilled workers and technicians who are in great demand on the labour market, instead of turning out a higher number of university graduates in fields with limited job prospects. A postgraduate VET system that allows young unemployed graduates to upgrade their skills or retrain in fields sought by the labour market is underdeveloped. Opportunities for continuing VET are underutilised, not least due to a rather restrictive and bureaucratic training levy system. In addition, career guidance services for young people outside school are poor (see also: OECD, 2016, 2017).

As mentioned before, young people generally experience a difficult transition from education to work. Apart from the scarcity of jobs, there is a mismatch between the skills and work experience of jobseekers and those required by employers. Tracer studies show that young people who graduated from VET centres have better prospects on the labour market than their peers with general education (ONEQ, 2017, 2020). Also, with an increasing sophistication of economic sectors, such as the pharmaceutical industry, financial activities, telecommunications, ICT, paper and cardboard industry, mechanical and electrical industries, chemical industry, as well as health and business services, Tunisia will require higher-level technical skills at secondary and tertiary levels.

Although we acknowledge that other educational subsectors contribute to human capital formation, in the following, the assessment concentrates on the VET sector. Many of the professions that form the backbone of economic and social developments hinge on vocational qualifications (see e.g. OECD, 2020). As argued above, Tunisian employers look for skilled workers and technicians whom they cannot readily find among the existing workforce. VET improves the labour market chances of young graduates. VET in this context denotes a broader field, from initial to continuing VET for young people and adults, at different (up to higher) levels of qualification, and incorporates the essential basic skills for exercising one's profession and for further learning.

Relevant strategies and action plans are in place to comprehensively reform the VET sector. However, necessary reforms have not gone ahead to the desired degree. We will analyse below the key challenges and priorities that could help system reform with the ultimate aim to better serve the economy, individuals and society. We summarise these challenges under the concepts of external consistency and internal consistency, both of which are central to any system reform.

The first major challenge of the Tunisian VET system is related to the lack of external consistency, i.e. a system that to a certain extent is not in line with the expectations and needs of its clients. It requires a revision of governance and financing arrangements at all levels, involving relevant actors, a more

comprehensive approach to overhaul legislation and implementation practices, and an adjustment, over time, of the network of training providers and offers in line with existing and future skills requirements.

The second major challenge relates to improved internal consistency of the VET system, i.e. the improvement and better alignment of key elements, such as curricula, teaching and learning materials, teachers' skills and opportunities for WBL, with a view to helping young and adult learners acquire the practical, work-related skills as required by the labour market and specified in qualifications. Quality assurance mechanisms in this context are to cover all elements of the system.

3.1 Tunisia's skills development systems and its partial lack of external consistency or alignment with economic and social needs

Reforms of VET are slow partly because of its low societal esteem

Skills development and vocational training have remained high on Tunisia's policy agenda. Related reforms are considered the cornerstones to drive Tunisia's economic, labour market and social development. The tripartite Social Pact signed in January 2013 by the government and the main employers' and employees' organisations presents a landmark agreement. In the second pillar of this document, each of the partners took upon themselves a number of commitments to improve employment and training policies. Soon thereafter, the National VET Reform Strategy 2016–2020 was designed (MFPE, 2013). These initiatives are viewed as models in the region. The grand visions, reform strategies and action plans are in place.

Furthermore, numerous bilateral and international donors, including the EU, have provided technical assistance to the further conceptualisation and pilot implementation of reforms. However, as mentioned earlier, frequent changes in key political positions and discontinuity in policy have prevented the country from making quicker progress and from capitalising on the many good pilot initiatives. Thus, implementing the stated VET reform objectives and projects has fallen short of expectations.

This is also due to the fact that, in their effort to break with the past and partly for understandable reasons, the Tunisian authorities have called into question some measures that were conceived before the revolution. For example, one of the targets of the EU PEFESE budget support programme, which was to help education and training reform (with a budget of EUR 63 million), was about moving a high percentage of young students into so-called '*filieres techniques*' or institutes of vocational training. The aim was to match the needs of the job market. The indicators were questioned, because they directly reflected the former axes of Ben Ali's presidential programme (and his fixation on numbers). The Tunisian authorities eventually gave up on EU PEFESE funds, rather than trying to reach the targeted number of VET graduates (Fontana, 2017). Furthermore, work on other fairly successful VET reform initiatives of the pre-revolution period were discontinued or temporarily halted, such as the quality assurance framework, partnerships with the private sector, and measures to increase the efficiency of VET providers and ALMPs.

VET still carries a rather negative image. Today, enrolment numbers are very low, accounting for just 9.1% of upper secondary school students in 2016 (see Table 5).

Despite efforts to promote priority specialisations, many VET programmes remain unattractive to learners and employers

There are issues with the VET programmes on offer, the restricted number of places for certain 'directions' (vocational or occupational fields), the attractiveness to learners, and the relevance to labour market demand (although demand is generally low). Enrolments in public VET in Tunisia follow a largely supply-driven logic. Young people can enrol both in March and September of a given year. The main enrolment date is September, when for example in 2018 approximately 24 000 places were available; 13 000 were then available in March 2019 (Ferchichi, 2019). The numbers for the two intake rounds every year depend on the available capacity of training centres and within the individual programmes for each level of training. Each training centre signals the number of training places available, rather than this following a more systematic, demand-driven approach.

The resulting 'occupancy rates' of training centres and specific programmes serve as indicators both for their attractiveness to students and the efficiency of the system. According to a survey undertaken by ITCEQ in 2018, only one in four (24%) training centres work at full capacity. More detailed analyses revealed that 50% of the centres located in the northwest of the country operate below their capacity, while in the northeast the occupancy rate actually exceeded 100% of their capacity. Those centres that did not work at full capacity cited ongoing restructuring works as the main reason, but also logistics problems and the current infrastructure of the centres, as well as the lack of accommodation, trainers for certain specialisations and/or interest on the part of young people. At times, training centres have suspended certain programmes due to a lack of trainers and/or interest (ITCEQ, 2018, p. 18). While reconstruction works might be of a temporary nature, all other reasons are of a structural nature and call for serious system reform.

The ATFP has been attempting for a number of years now to open up to the private sector. It changed its communication strategy towards the promotion of VET in sectors and trades with better employment prospects. The ATFP selected so-called priority specialisations (*'spécialités dites prioritaires'*), which follow an economic rather than a school-based logic. For example, at the time of the 'Sama Dubai' megaproject, national authorities wanted to attract young people into the building and associated sectors. Afterwards, related programmes were revised. Now, following the request of the AVFA, agriculture is on the list of priority specialisations, and so are the textile and tourism industries.

Thus, when a certain demand is expressed by a sector, the ATFP encourages young people to enrol into respective programmes, paying them a monthly scholarship. Specialisations that are no longer in demand are removed from the list. Of the 250 specialisations currently on the ATFP's list, 50 are in higher demand (Ferchichi, 2019). However, despite the financial incentives offered by the state, it is difficult to make young people enrol in certain specialisations. Work, for example, in agriculture or construction is seen as hard and not particularly rewarding. Those who have learned a construction trade tend to go abroad where they have better job opportunities. To train for a job in the leather and shoe industry is not considered interesting by young people, but respective specialisations have remained on the list of VET offers. The ATFP were hoping that the sector would show signs of recovery soon (Ferchichi, 2019).

In conclusion, the VET system continues to offer a number of VET specialisations for which there is hardly any labour market demand and in which only a few students enrol. Government actors may fear the political consequences of closing down institutions or programmes and relocating teachers, but there is also no plan for how this problem could be solved in the mid to long term.

VET centres are struggling with high dropout rates

The VET system has important social functions by (re)including weaker students from poorer backgrounds. A preparatory course to the CAP programme, which was designed jointly with the Ministry of Education, aims to attract earlier dropouts back into education (Ferchichi, 2019). Another social goal of the National VET Reform Strategy 2016–2020 was the lowering of dropout rates from 35% to 15% by the end of 2018. Despite major improvements, in 2018, training centres were still struggling with an average dropout rate of 22.3% (ITCEQ, 2018, p. 16). It is generally higher for CAP programmes, where it reached 25.5%. In 45% of the training centres offering CAP diplomas, the dropout rate was over 30%. Some learners drop out for personal reasons. However, almost half (47%) of the surveyed training centre directors mentioned that courses do not meet the expectations of learners, which can lead to academic failure and abandonment. Almost a third (28%) of the directors cited the lack of adequate equipment for learning. Furthermore, inappropriate accommodation conditions were quoted as a reason (especially for girls), and the fact that learners are not automatically entitled to accommodation from their second year of registration when their programmes last longer than one school year. Some directors also referred to a lack of technical and pedagogical qualifications of trainers as a factor for dropping out (ITCEQ, 2018).

Communication mechanisms between VET and the labour market are not fully functioning

The combined factors of the low attractiveness of VET courses on offer, limited participation, students dropping out, and the resulting low number of graduates suggest that the public VET system is still ill-adjusted to the needs of both learners and the labour market. This in turn calls for wider system reforms with a view to bringing it in line with the needs of its key clients: individuals, employers and society at large.

There is no structured mechanism to systematically gather demographic, social, labour market and skills data at national, sectoral and regional levels and inform adjustments to the network of (publicly funded) VET providers and programmes. In addition, there is no comprehensive VET management information system in place that would translate demand into elements such as enrolments, numbers and skills of personnel, needs for equipment and materials, accommodation places, and monitoring of the state of the system. Information, counselling and guidance activities that would help young people determine their future education and professional careers are also largely absent.

National governance arrangements are fragmented, involving several ministries and agencies, not necessarily working to common goals, legislation and frameworks

VET reform could be helped forward if there was clear leadership that was well coordinated and resourced. However, the governance of initial and continuing VET at national level in Tunisia is complex. As mentioned before, the most important institution is now the MJSIP, which develops, implements and evaluates government policy in VET. The ministry's executive agency, the AFTP, manages the largest number of training centres covering most sectors. The National Centre for the Training of Trainers and Training Engineering (CENAFFIF – Centre National de Formation de Formateurs et d'Ingénierie de Formation) takes care of teacher training and curriculum development, while the National Centre for Continuing Training and Professional Promotion (CNFCPP – Centre National de Formation Continue et de Promotion Professionnelle) coordinates continuing training. The ANETI in turn has responsibility for the training of unemployed jobseekers as one among other active labour market measures.

In addition, the AFMT and the AVFA – as agencies under the respective sector ministries, as well as the Ministry of Health and the Tunisian Army – run a number of training centres in their fields. Finally,

there is a large number of private initial and continuing training providers. These include non-accredited training centres, where provision goes unchecked for quality.

The MJSIP is responsible for the overall coordination of the various public institutions and supervising VET. A permanent committee coordinates all activities with the administrations concerned and the social partners. Finally, a Superior Council with an advisory role brings together once or twice a year the ministries in charge of education and training with the social partners. However, it is not clear to what extent these coordination structures are really effective.

The organisation of management structures for VET (partly) by sector is a remnant of a VET governance model that aimed at linking training centres closely to the industries providing specific types of training. Also, initial and continuing training stand apart as two different systems with different providers, funding models, qualifications, teaching staff and teaching materials. Now, this model and the multitude of actors involved appears inefficient, especially considering the desire for overall VET system development and reform in line with changed labour market and social demand. Initial and continuing VET in the different sectors would need to work towards new, commonly agreed national frameworks of policy and legislation, funding arrangements, qualifications, quality and quality assurance, and transparency and accountability.

Hence, adjusting overall governance arrangements could be a major step to help system reform forward. The new arrangements need to streamline or strengthen the mechanisms for:

- overall system planning, funding, management, development, monitoring and evaluation under a common national policy, jurisdiction, frameworks and guidelines; and
- more structured involvement of the social partners in respective strategic decisions and operational aspects.

Role of regional and local actors in VET is currently limited but expected to change

Change, or VET reform for that matter, cannot be decreed from the top. Its basis – or the number of change actors who deliver reform at local level – needs to be considerably broadened, including in Tunisia.

The OECD (2015a) and the ILO (2018), among others, have argued that past policies in Tunisia have contributed to regional polarisation and rural poverty. This suggests that a new regional development policy was implemented, which included some level of decentralisation. Tunisia's constitution from 2014 does include 'decentralisation' as the main concept (in Chapter 7 on Local Powers), which sets the context for such a fundamental change in governance. As part of Tunisia's regional development strategy, the authorities have planned for a greater devolution of responsibilities, i.e. to elected governments at the regional and local (municipal) level (which presents a 'deconcentration' of powers, rather than a decentralisation).

A decentralised setting for managing VET and employment policies is not a new topic in Tunisia. It has been on the agenda for over 20 years, since the 1996 MANFORME programme and its focus on demand-oriented vocational training. The MFPE and donors have been making more serious efforts since 2011, although not consistently, to support or modify governance arrangements. The National VET Reform 2014–2018 established 'good governance of the system, consistent with the Social Pact, the national economy and decentralisation' as one of its main directions (MFPE, 2013). Suggested reform measures included taking regional specificities into consideration and partnerships being institutionalised. Furthermore, decentralised governance was a topic of the aforementioned PEFESE

project implemented from 2013 to 2016, as well as of the EU GEMM project and the ETF between 2012 and 2018 (see ETF, 2016, 2017). However, as mentioned above, many of the planned reform projects did not go further ahead. Assigning bigger roles to regional and local actors with a view to adjusting to local needs still remains a major issue.

There are many factors that explain why the decentralisation agenda has not yet gained full momentum. Political tensions and frequent changes of ministerial actors may have hampered the pursuit of a longer-term vision and more fundamental changes. Also, there is still a certain reluctance to give up decision-making powers and control over resources within a traditionally centralised system. The ATFP, for example, 'wish to maintain their competence at central level for selecting the courses offered by training centres' (GOPA, 2019). However, it is also true that entities at the local level may lack the capacity and motivation to take over new tasks and responsibilities.

Local governments today are weak: in 2015 local budgets in Tunisia represented only 3.6% of the national government budget, compared to 10% in Morocco and 20% in Turkey (World Bank, 2015). Between 70% and 90% of the municipal budget goes to wages, thus covering operational costs rather than investments (OECD, 2018).

On 16 March 2019, the MFPE outlined a plan for reorganising VET provision in the regions. The plan lists the following objectives:

- align all actors behind the methodologies developed by MFPE and their agencies, such as for collecting data, monitoring and evaluation;
- allow for more flexible governance arrangements that are supported by reliable information systems;
- strengthen the capacity of the Regional Directorates for Vocational Training and Employment who would be in charge of VET provision in the regions; and
- assign increasing levels of autonomy to regional VET structures (GOPA, 2019).

The ATFP has also been pursuing the idea to organise regional governance through five macro-regions. This raises the question whether these macro-regions would have the potential to become self-governing and self-sufficient units in terms of their economic and social development and to manage training and employment within their regions, combining national and local funding. Discussions are still needed as to whether the governance of education and training should be tied more closely to existing territorial structures.

The EU-funded IRADA and PAFIP projects (co-funded with Agence Française de Développement (AFD) – the French Development Agency) are providing substantial resources to create momentum and try out new decentralised approaches, involving regional actors in initiatives aimed at economic, human resource and social development.

IRADA (budget: EUR 32 million, project duration until 2022) partly builds on the smaller-scale EU/ETF GEMM project, which involved four Tunisian pilot regions and was carried out between 2012 and 2018. Partnerships in these governorates provided inputs to draft Regional Master Plans for VET. They designed and agreed on a number of VET development projects, which were then evaluated at national level.

IRADA aims to build the capacity of regional actors, involving also the private sector in local skills and economic development. IRADA does so through projects designed by regional actors themselves and which respond to the specificities and needs in eight governorates: Gabès, Médenine, Gafsa,

Kasserine, Sfax, Sidi Bouzid, Bizerte and Jendouba. These regions are considered to have potential for implementing their own action plans and promoting investments and innovation through decentralised, participatory approaches. Under the IRADA project, regional VET system assessments were carried out in the eight regions in 2019, following the ETF Torino Process model. IRADA provides assistance to 4 out of the 14 projects of the VET Reform Strategy for 2014–2018.

PAFIP concentrates on four job pools in the north and east of the country and on the industrial sector. It aims at a territorial anchoring and a qualitative leap of VET system reforms, based on partnerships and combining education and training with labour market integration measures. The 17 training centres involved are encouraged to network with local and regional partners and become regional outlets for skilled people and real hubs for economic and social development.

In some regions like Sfax or Sousse, things are progressing well. But initial initiatives have also shown that regional stakeholders in Tunisia are not always fully prepared to embrace the new approaches.

What is still lacking in other regions is:

- experience to work in partnerships and pursue common goals;
- systematic data collection and analyses to build robust knowledge of both broader and regionally specific issues related to economic, labour market and social conditions, as well as priorities for their development;
- the capacity and resources to assess the potential for certain sectors or trades to grow, including the ability of certain industries to export products abroad (which requires knowledge of, among others, international markets and quality standards);
- the ability to reason along economic or regional clusters and value chains, which bring production or harvesting activities together with processing, preservation, marketing, sales and transport, and related coordination, ICT and technical skills; and
- the competence to design relevant projects in partnership with, for example, businesses, professional groups, civil society organisations and researchers.

Hence, capacity-building of stakeholders at national, regional and local levels, including social partner representatives and employers, is key to any decentralisation agenda. It is already an integral part of donor projects. Moreover, this needs to be accompanied by a clear definition of the mandate and roles of the different actors underpinning a certain autonomy of the regions, as well as the allocation of appropriate resources.

The need for increased levels of autonomy by local VET institutions

In August 2019, a new government decree was adopted that assigns more autonomy to training providers, as mentioned in Section 2.5.2. However, related provisions have not yet been implemented. According to an ETF survey (2019),³¹ decision-making was considered participatory in most VET centres. Training centre boards have some influence over the curriculum, recruitment and the internal use of the budget. However, generally, decisions about recruitment, dismissal or suspension of trainers and trainers' salaries, including setting pay scales and salary increases, are mostly taken at the national level. By contrast, principals and boards in private training centres have greater authority, including over salaries and recruitment. Only 42% of training centre boards include business

³¹ A survey carried out by the ETF in Tunisia in 2017 sampled all teachers and directors in 179 training centres. In total, 117 training centres and 386 trainers responded, which represents response rates of 65% and 9%, respectively.

representatives. This is also due to the fact that employers have a consultative role only. Overall, 90% of the principals reported the ‘inadequacy of the training centre budget and resources’, along with ‘government regulation and policy’ as major constraints limiting their effectiveness (ETF, 2019, p. 3). The ATFP has been working on a new approach classifying VET centres according to A, B and C levels and assigning different degrees of autonomy. However, for now, this presents rather an administrative approach, defining how much money is allocated to VET centres, based on student numbers and other parameters. The ETF, on the other hand, has been working with the MFPE, various agencies and a few VET centres to develop a concept for what could be labelled an ‘entrepreneurial centre’.

Although sufficient funding for VET appears to be available, the system is fragmented and rather inefficient

Funding for VET comes mainly from the state budget and is either transferred directly to training centres or implemented through two funds: (i) the Vocational Training and Apprenticeship Promotion Fund and (ii) the Employment Promotion Fund. The first finances continuing training and, in part, training centres. Funds are collected through a special tax on companies who do not invest in other forms of training (1% to 2% of their payroll). In essence, this fund is underutilised. The second fund is financed by the state budget and secures funding for ALMPs. The state subsidises part of the cost for (public or private) training through the ‘vocational education and training cheque’ (*Chèque Formation Professionnelle*) for specific sectors considered a national priority. This is a relevant tool that is, however, not widely used. Reasons may include rigidities in the use of the fund, complex procedures, a lack of proper communication about it, and the non-availability of relevant training offers in certain regions.

Although sufficient funding for VET appears to be available in Tunisia, there is an issue here again of a fragmented, bureaucratic and partly inefficient system. A comprehensive analysis would be useful to address VET funding and financing in a more holistic way. Legal and funding tools could take a more comprehensive approach and embrace a wider spectrum of initial or continuing training measures for different target groups, involving non-state actors in the fund management and making economies of scale.

Training centres also have their own revenues from registration fees, continuing training activities and the sale of training products. However, this represents only a small fraction of their budgets. Some argue that VET centres could generate higher levels of own revenues, but the incentives and mechanisms to do so seem to be either absent or insufficiently used. The cost of training in private centres is borne by the beneficiaries themselves.

Recommendations for action

Improved external consistency or relevance of VET through ...

A skills development system that is largely not in line with the aspirations of individuals, employers and society at large requires new communication mechanisms between the system and its principal clients to be put in place and that the basics are re-adjusted in terms of the overall governance, financing and quality assurance of the system.

... skills anticipation and career guidance for better labour market outcomes

Demographic, social, labour market and skills data would need to be gathered more systematically at national, sectoral and regional levels and inform a restructuring of the network of VET providers and programmes. Public funds for training could be used more efficiently by preparing learners for their

integration in society and the labour market. In the absence of a sophisticated – and, admittedly, costly – system of labour market intelligence at national and regional levels, informed discussions with economic think tanks, experts and employers on the future needs of the economy at national, sectoral and regional levels may be helpful. The ultimate aim would be to devise, and implement over time, a mid- to long-term plan for the gradual adjustment of the network of (publicly funded) training providers and courses to better suit identified needs. Regularly collected information on the satisfaction levels and career paths of VET graduates could also serve as useful inputs.

Furthermore, more (online) opportunities for career information, as well as counselling and guidance in and outside schools, would help young people determine their future education and professional careers. Related digitalisation efforts of employment offices are a step in the right direction and could be a useful source of information.

... new and coherent multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance arrangements at central, sectoral, regional and local levels

It is recognised that the currently highly centralised governance and financing of VET are among the main factors that hamper more relevant VET provision in Tunisia. High youth unemployment and huge differences between the regions in Tunisia call for new arrangements in the managing of education, training and employment policies that incorporate the concepts of ‘decentralisation’ or ‘regionalisation’. A comprehensive and coherent approach is needed to foster a multi-stakeholder governance and financing system at national, sectoral and regional/local levels that has the potential to answer socio-economic and related skills needs more efficiently.

With the Social Pact, an overall tripartite structure to advise on VET policies is in place. However, there is an issue of operationalising the provisions of the Social Pact and creating all kinds of public–private partnerships. Social partner organisations at national and sectoral levels should be able to participate in the dialogue on skills development policies on an equal footing with government. Bipartite sector skills councils, bringing together VET curriculum experts and employers, could be set up for priority sectors to analyse skills and training needs and develop respective qualifications and curricula. It is clear that all partners to the various forms of dialogue and expert work would need to become familiar with their new roles and enhance their capacity.

The roles and responsibilities of the MJSIP, ATFP and the social partners for overall strategy design, system planning, management, monitoring and evaluation need to be strengthened. The MJSIP would have to facilitate overall reform and increase the relevance and quality of skills development systems in Tunisia. Furthermore, there is a need for the MJSIP, ATFP and their partners to design and implement common national frameworks for qualifications, quality assurance, transparency and accountability, under which sector-specific training agencies, such as the AFMT and AVFA as well as all regional and local actors, can act autonomously.

Active involvement of regional and local stakeholders in the design and implementation of VET and employment policies is key to unlocking the economic, employment and social development potential of the regions. That is to say that, also at regional and local levels, roles and responsibilities of the different actors, including the Regional Directorates for VET and Employment, local ANETI offices and the social partners, have to be redefined. Adequate resources, as well as approaches and tools, are necessary to strengthen the capacity of actors in the regions and allow for an efficient and effective management of the new tasks, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of policies (see e.g. ETF and MFPE, 2017).

However, one of the major preconditions for a functioning decentralised system for managing VET and employment policies is their embeddedness in an overall, well-prepared administrative reform of the country. Such a reform would need to reduce today's weak and inefficient administrative structures composed of 6 regions, 24 governorates, 264 'delegations' or districts, and numerous municipalities and regroup them into bigger, potentially self-sufficient, self-governing units. It would need to assign not only more responsibilities, but also more resources to regional and local administrations. It requires a national plan; new legislation that stipulates how functions shall be divided between the state, governorates, districts and municipalities in a future decentralised system; which resources shall be transferred from the state; and which types of local taxes regional or local authorities would be able to collect. Without a proper financial base, any decentralisation will just remain a piece of paper. In this respect, Tunisia can learn from other countries, such as the Central European countries that joined the EU in 2004 or more recently also Albania. The latter adopted a new legal framework and are changing their administrative structures to strengthen local governance.

In the meantime, the ATFP and other VET agencies can go ahead and pilot new approaches for decentralised management of VET with the help of donor projects. The ATFP and the other VET agencies could deliberately promote the formation of networks involving all relevant stakeholders to identify skills needs and create partnerships for employment and skills at regional/local levels. The regions are encouraged to do their own planning, based on prior identification of training and skills needs in the given region or governorate or a specific sector (e.g. tourism in Médenine).

Innovative approaches that aim to improve the development and use of human capital in the regions and are already implemented by donor projects include:

- the formation of a sustainable partnership, or 'public–private dialogue platform', which involves relevant stakeholders in each governorate;
- structured analysis and dialogue on the development needs and potential of the private sector in each region;
- the elaboration of action plans for the development of relevant sectors and areas;
- the financing, with the help of donors, of regional, integrated development projects (adapted from GOPA, 2019); and
- adjustments to the design and delivery of VET courses and curricula in accordance with regional needs and with the central level, and with an emphasis on involving employers (see also: ETF, 2017).

Communities, employers' and employees' associations, and individual employers are key players in all aspects mentioned above. Recognising the importance of to promote local economic and social progress, they are encouraged to be involved in economic, labour market and skills needs analyses, as well as the design, delivery and monitoring of training policies. Initial training for young people plays an equally important part as second-chance education, skills upgrading or retraining measures for adults. In this context, an earlier report for the Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2012 (Walther, 2011) highlights the significance of building skills required in the informal sector, which is widespread in Tunisia.

Building on the 2019 decree, there is a need to strengthen the autonomy of VET providers, which in turn are managed by competent school boards and collaborate with relevant actors in the region. Further efforts could be taken to turn some training centres into centres of excellence, with additional functions of national or sectoral relevance and possibly funded jointly with the private sector.

More autonomy of regional actors and VET providers will have to be accompanied by functioning national frameworks that ensure quality and accountability, and an efficient use of public funding. Such frameworks typically include quality-assured qualifications and/or programmes (frame curricula) that have been approved by national or economic sector bodies and to which VET provision would be adjusted. Various other quality assurance mechanisms, including self-assessments and inspections of VET providers, would have to be put in place to set the quality standards for VET provision and encourage VET providers to continuously develop and improve. This could include linking VET funding partially to student retention and skills outcomes.

... a monitoring and evaluation system to assess progress and inform policy design

In addition, to allow national-level monitoring and evaluation of the system, VET providers and regional actors would need to report regularly against a nationally agreed set of indicators, for which a number of management tools and guidelines would be needed. This would include, among others, a comprehensive VET management information system that could help the regional and national levels to monitor processes and outcomes of autonomous providers, and design and plan VET policies overall. Respective data would need to be translated into, for example, enrolments, the number and qualifications of personnel, the purchase of equipment and materials, and the number of accommodation places.

While the MJSIP and their partners have the leadership for revising VET governance and financing arrangements, the ownership of suggested reforms clearly increases when the actors concerned are consulted from the outset. A major dialogue process involving a multitude of actors will have to be instigated that requires a great deal of strategic oversight and planning, technical, legal and communication skills, and last but not least human and financial resources inside the MJSIP, ATFP and among their dialogue partners. Any changes to governance and financing arrangements will need to be reflected in changes to legislation. It is recommended that Tunisian actors take a more comprehensive approach to overhauling the legal framework for initial and continuing VET, including base laws and secondary legislation. Enshrined in the new legislation should be a funding model that underpins the new governance arrangements and promotes education and training in a lifelong learning perspective.

An undertaking of this size is by no means a quick fix. Even if all actors agreed and made use of appropriate management tools and capacity, the new arrangements would require years to prepare and take root. They necessitate support across the political spectrum, a clear roadmap, financial and technical support, and close monitoring in a constant cycle of designing, implementing, evaluating and redesigning policy.

3.2 Tunisia's skills development systems and its lack of internal consistency or quality of provision

Poor basic skills prevent further learning and mastery of higher-skilled professions

As mentioned in Section 2.4, areas of concern in the Tunisian education system are the low quality, including poor basic skills levels, combined with the retention of learners up to completing secondary education. As many as 71.6% of students aged 15 performed poorly in reading comprehension and 74.8% in mathematical skills in the PISA 2015 test. These basic skills are considered essential in most of today's job market. Problems in mastering these basic skills and negative experiences at school often prevent people from further learning. In 2019, over one-third (37.1%) of young people aged 18 to 24 had left education before completing secondary education (INS, LFS; see also Figure 5). Second-

chance education is of crucial importance in this context. Recognising this, UK Aid, AFD and Unicef, among others, are supporting the enhancement of second-chance education.

There are issues with VET curricula, teaching materials and teacher skills

Although for VET graduates it might potentially be easier to engage in gainful economic activity than for their peers with academic education, quite a number of graduates still lack the necessary practical, work-related and entrepreneurial skills. These skills might make them more readily employable and qualify them for better-skilled jobs or for creating their own businesses. There are issues with the qualifications on offer, curricula, teaching and learning materials, teachers' skills and the practice orientation of VET. Swisscontact, among others, is implementing a Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation-funded programme to improve the employability of young people and the quality, relevance and attractiveness of continuing VET.

The ETF survey of principals and teachers provides a closer insight into the conditions prevailing at training centres (ETF, 2019). Around 80% of the teachers who responded to the ETF survey said that, when planning lessons, they are guided by the national curriculum documents, but also by their knowledge of what employers need. Teachers also take an active role in devising and implementing their own assessment tools. On the other hand, around two-thirds of the surveyed teachers believed that most classes and students often do not have access to resources for learning, such as textbooks, up-to-date tools and equipment, consumable materials, computer hardware and software, internet and other learning materials and sources (ibid., p. 4).

Similarly, more than two-thirds of the training centre principals identified the following constraints: 'inadequate instructional materials; shortage of qualified and/or well performing trainers, support personnel; teaching competences for students with special needs; shortage or inadequacy of library materials; lack of instructors for practical training, combined with shortage of computers and/or software for instruction' (ibid., p. 4).

Low levels of pre- and in-service training of VET teachers hamper modern VET provision

The CPD of principals and teachers and the necessary technical and pedagogical skills are widely recognised as 'vital not only for bringing about improvements in teaching and learning' (ibid., p. 1). Training centre principals, teachers and other staff are the key actors of change: they need to be well prepared to introduce the necessary changes at institutional level. This concerns all aspects of school development and the pedagogical process, including the adaptation of curricula; the development of teaching, learning and assessment resources; the introduction of new technologies; liaison and work with local stakeholders, including employers; and career guidance services.

Only about 40% of teachers benefited from an initial degree that integrated pedagogical training, while another 36% received some other pedagogical training (ibid., p. 2). A low 21% of teachers reported participation in CPD that focused on their own occupational or sectoral specialism. The same percentage reported participation in CPD on employer premises or provided by business (ibid., p. 4).

According to law number 2008-10 of 11 February 2008, CPD constitutes a major component of the national system for human resource development. There are directives and laws that define responsibilities for the key actors. However, this framework 'does not make CPD a requirement or an entitlement for teachers, nor does it integrate CPD within career progression. There are some policy statements regarding CPD for vocational trainers' (ibid.). The MFPE has the formal role of coordinating

the agencies, validating their programmes and setting their budgets, including with respect to the CPD of vocational teachers. But, currently, ‘there is not yet an authoritative policy statement that guides improvements or reform nor action plan’ that sets targets, quality standards and national or sectoral priorities for teacher training (ibid.). Implementation is also hampered by ‘the slowness and complexity of the administrative procedures at the central level and the lack of a strong regional leadership through the regional directorates of employment and vocational training’ (ibid., p. 5).

CENAFFIF is the designated provider of CPD for vocational teachers. It is unclear to what extent CENAFFIF is sufficiently proactive and responsive in developing CPD programmes that meet the changing needs of vocational trainers and principals, for example with respect to new technologies and management skills. The ETF report states that ‘it is uncertain whether the CPD offer is regularly updated and relevant to the needs of training centres’. The following issues speak against responsiveness:

- CENAFFIF does not have an up-to-date needs analysis from the training centres.
- Funding, programme design, monitoring, evaluation and delivery are largely controlled by CENAFFIF and the other national agencies, making it difficult for training centres or employers to influence provision.
- The learning outcomes and teaching quality of training providers are not effectively evaluated. So there is no pressure to use CPD to raise performance’ (ibid., p. 3).

According to CENAFFIF, 1 100 vocational trainers participated in one of the three different CPD programmes during the 12 months prior to the ETF survey. However, there are no published statistics on the number of participants per training programme, location, length of the training and the learning programme on the training of trainers. About 60% of trainers say – and this is serious from the point of view of reform – that they are deterred from participation in CPD because there are no relevant offers and insufficient incentives. Around 50% say they lack strong support from their training centres. Furthermore, CPD is not designed to prepare teachers to carry out additional or special responsibilities, such as mentoring, curriculum development or resource development. Data also suggests that teachers participating in CPD working in southern and central regions obtained fewer hours of CPD than those in the northern regions and in Grand Tunis (ibid., p. 4).

Alternative training schemes exist but their delivery needs improvements

Given the suboptimal conditions at school to develop relevant skills, one aspect that deserves particular attention is the integration of Work-Based Learning (WBL) into skills formation systems in VET (and also higher education). The ETF defines WBL as ‘learning that takes place in a real working environment through participation in the work process, irrespective of whether the learners are young people, students, unemployed people or employees, or whether they are paid or unpaid’ (ETF, 2013, p. 4).

As the most common schemes of WBL, the Tunisian system distinguishes between alternance training, internships and apprenticeships. The key distinctive feature is the person’s status: in alternance training, the trainee has the status of a student enrolled at a training centre. The second model implies that a student is resident at a training centre and spends short internship periods within a company. In this case, the trainee has a status similar to that of alternance training. In contrast, an apprentice signs a contract with the company and becomes an employee, while he or she receives additional training at a vocational school, training centre or higher education institution. In contrast, those who have enrolled at secondary or higher education institutions and just spend temporary

periods on internship or alternance training schemes in selected companies do not become regular company employees. The likelihood of being hired by the company at the end of the training period is typically higher for apprentices due to the intensity of the training in companies and the practical, work-related skills acquired.

Alternance training is seen as a suitable alternative to full-time studies in training centres to help familiarise students with the working culture and technologies of companies, engage in real-life projects and acquire practical skills. Investing in this system is connected with the hope of investing in future competences. However, in Tunisia, alternance training has remained a weakness despite existing partnership agreements with companies. Depending on the sector, students struggle to get internship places in companies. In a few sectors with generally less attractive working conditions, such as the leather industry, more training places are offered and young people more easily find employment, sometimes even before completing their VET programme (Chelbi, 2017).

In pre-COVID-19 times, some positive signals came from both the textile and tourism sectors. A decade ago, the textile sector was in sharp decline: materials and equipment had fallen out of use and investments had dropped. With the sector picking up again, it also started to reinvest. Similar trends have been observed for the tourism industry. Recognising the contributions that alternance training can make to producing the necessary skills of future employees, new partnerships with companies were fostered. This included agreements with training centres, the provision of internships, the assignment of company mentors to students and remuneration for their work (Ferchichi, 2019). The recent COVID-19 crisis abruptly halted these positive developments. Ensuing consequences may be drastic for the alternance training system, as economic sectors, especially tourism, face an oversupply of jobseekers and workers and undersupply of income/ visitors.

In terms of the share of persons involved, alternance training in the AFTP diploma system represents slightly more than 80% of the students, followed by the residential model with some period of training spent on company internships (13%), and apprenticeship training (6%). In contrast, non-diploma-based learning involves, by definition, 100% training in the workplace (Chelbi, 2017, p. 6). As regards apprenticeships, it is necessary to differentiate between the diploma course and other types, the latter of which represent the largest number of apprentices: the F0 apprenticeship, which does not include any training at a centre, and the F4 apprenticeship, which includes 4 hours of training per week at a centre.

Stakeholders are questioning the figure of 80% participation in alternance training. The problem lies in the current course rotation between the training centre and company and the period spent in the latter, which is generally not in accordance with the necessary minimum required to ensure that learners acquire skills. General subjects, such as language, mathematical skills or theoretical aspects that accompany technical subjects, are taught at a training centre. Practical skills should be acquired within the company, following a structured plan, and should be validated by the centre and the company. In essence, a significant number of learners should not be counted as being on company training, as the latter is not structured and not monitored effectively. As a result, the actual number of people on efficient alternance training in Tunisia is well below 80%, although the precise figure is not known.

According to the ETF survey, the majority of vocational teachers in Tunisia place a big emphasis on learning from practice. Of the surveyed teachers, 70% said that their students partake in 'at least 10% of their learning on work placements' and that 'direct interactions with employers and employees are infrequent for as many as 76% of students' (ETF, 2019, p. 2).

The legal framework for the VET system (Law No. 2008-10 of 11 February 2008) recognises WBL as the norm, and the residential mode as an exception. More recently, several regulations have been adopted that specify how training in the workplace shall be conducted in the alternance training or apprenticeship schemes. They regulate, among other things, the status of the trainee, allowances granted to them, social security cover, the contract governing the course and follow-up.

Employers from the private sector have been drawn into the governance of initial and continuing training since the launch of the MANFORME programme. In contrast, the Tunisian General Labour Union has only been involved in VET since the signing of the tripartite Social Pact in 2013. However, to date, the two social partners have not yet fully played the roles assigned to them. This is also why the National VET Reform Strategy 2016–2020 includes measures to strengthen the social partner organisations. The reform document mentions as objectives public–private partnerships, rather than WBL. But it did specify a target of having at least 10% of all students on apprenticeship schemes from 2016 onwards.

Current challenges of funding WBL include the lack of compensation for tutors and trainees, the need for trainees to take care of their own travel and accommodation, and the absence of specific provision for the agricultural sector. There is also a lack of incentives for professional and trade union organisations to play an active role in WBL.

The constraints and challenges facing WBL can be clustered into five areas.

- The first area relates to different governance and funding issues. There is an issue with the fact that no complementary training is provided at a centre under the F0 apprenticeship scheme. Furthermore, there is a problem with the use of the training cheque in its current form, which calls for a revision. Finally, there is an issue of the governance of public ATFP centres, which has deteriorated since the 2011 revolution with the discontinuation of their operational councils.
- The second area concerns trainers and apprenticeship consultants at training centres who are increasingly reluctant to go to the company to monitor young people. Apart from the lack of funding for their business travel, the status of these staff is in question, as they no longer have sufficient working hours to follow up on students. Partly as a consequence, a high level of absenteeism has been observed among learners at the workplace. There is also a high dropout rate among young people who do not follow a structured learning path.
- A third issue is communication, an area in which centres did not make particular effort and where public supervisory bodies were not very effective. This particularly concerns the communication by centres on profiles or programmes no longer practised today, which partly explains the decline in enrolments. Centres also do not communicate properly and explain the different professions and career options to young people and encourage them to register.
- A fourth area relates to companies and the absence of trained tutors available to instruct and supervise trainees. Professional and trade union organisations are not structured or do not have persons specifically dealing with human resources and training.
- Finally, the issue of mobility needs to be discussed from two perspectives: mobility between regions and mobility between countries. The former problem is especially acute when learners are required to undergo training in a company that is far away from the training centre at which they are enrolled. The latter raises the problem of the recognition of diplomas. However, Tunisia has recently been dealing with this issue through co-certification agreements (Chelbi, 2017).

The ILO accompanies Tunisia in the analysis and assistance aiming at reinforcing WbL in the framework of the project « *Rendre les compétences Visibles* », coming to an end in 2021. A strategic

note and related guidelines have been designed and are in the process of being validated, in addition to a diagnostic assessment of WbL in the governorates of Béja, Jendouba, Siliana et le Kef³².

Recommendations for action

Improved internal consistency or quality of VET provision through ...

... strengthening the capacity of autonomous VET providers

Strengthening the autonomy of training centres, within agreed national frameworks and with support from partners, could potentially lead to increasing the relevance and quality of VET provision. Under a revised legal framework for VET that incorporates governance and financing within a decentralised setting and within national frameworks for qualifications, quality assurance and accountability (reporting), authorities, agencies, regional directorates, vocational training centres and their local partners could practise new forms of cooperation and authority. Even within the existing legal framework, Tunisia could take further steps to operationalise VET school autonomy, delegating more responsibilities to management, training centre boards and their partners, and finding pragmatic ways to incentivise their entrepreneurial spirit. Local actors could be entrusted to participate in key decisions relating to the choice of their training offers; the recruitment and (extra) remuneration of staff; the management of all affairs of the training centre, including marketing its own courses, enrolments, the development of curricula integrating WBL and of teaching and learning resources; career guidance activities; the signing of agreements with companies; the signing of other contracts (such as for renting out premises or producing products or delivering services for the local community); and the generation and use of budget. Social partners, students and family representatives can make useful contributions to the management and development of training centres.

The role of principals, training centre management and teachers, alongside their economic partners, needs to be strengthened in relation to the development of the curriculum and teaching. Teacher training centres could support and coordinate teachers to develop up-to-date instructional materials in a collaborative manner. There is also an issue of nurturing evaluation practices at the level of training centres.

By diversifying the sources of funding (state, region/municipality, employer, centre's own resources), training centres may be put in a position to acquire up-to-date equipment and consumables. Furthermore, training centres need to be equipped with appropriate hardware, software and internet, and teachers need to be trained on the use of ICT in lesson design and in classroom learning. This will help teachers to also develop more differentiated learning tasks and to use formative assessment to inform teaching and learning. Teachers and pedagogical experts could collaborate to develop and share instructional materials and textbooks.

... the CPD of VET teachers and trainers

The MJSIP, different institutions and stakeholders should work together to agree on strategies for the initial and continuing professional development of teachers and trainers, to improve the normative framework, to set objectives for CPD for vocational teachers in the 2025 National Strategy for Vocational Education, and to define a feasible action plan. CENAFFIF, perhaps through collaboration with other professional CPD providers, may review the methodology of their CPD programmes and, where appropriate, introduce modern and varied methodologies. Tools need to be developed to

³² [wcmstest4_186509.pdf \(skillsforemployment.org\)](#) and [RCV - Rendre les compétences visibles : améliorer l'orientation professionnelle, l'apprentissage et la reconnaissance des compétences en Tunisie \(ilo.org\)](#)

identify needs and funding mechanisms for the technical training of teachers (or the training of trainers). There is much to be gained from CENAFFIF working in partnership with industry and other partners to provide specialised professional CPD designed to update professional knowledge and skills and work practices.

As part of the overall VET governance reform, there is an issue of enabling regional directorates to activate their decision-making roles. Better coordination between regional structures and training centres and their partners is key to providing the required materials and human resources. Training centres have an important role in better analysing their training requirements and need to share and use this information for the planning and coordination of CPD. The MFPE is also asked to consider or revise the status, compensation, training and recognition offered to teachers with mentoring roles at training centres. Mentorship might be used more generally as a form of CPD for VET trainers and principals. CPD opportunities should be linked to improvements in teaching, which are identified through feedback, and to career development. Where possible, CPD should be designed to prepare trainers and principals to take on enhanced responsibilities and to gain recognition through promotion. National aggregated records of CPD participation could be published (ETF, 2019).

... extending and improving WBL arrangements

Evidence suggests that, where WBL is made a structural element of training provision, a smoother transition from school to work is achieved, as opposed to studying first and then working (ETF, 2013, among others). Sectors where WBL is deemed to have some potential for development in Tunisia include aeronautics, automotive components, computers, textile and clothing, tourism and crafts (Chelbi, 2017). On the other hand, agriculture and the BTP, for which WBL presents a major problem, would require specific national support measures.

Learning under the F0 apprenticeship scheme needs to be reviewed in order to complement company training with training at a centre. Improvements to the functioning of non-diploma-based learning should include additional training at private training centres. This means that a company who hires an apprentice could take them to a private centre for additional learning. Private centres do have the capacity to take care of complementary theoretical and soft skills training. Private training centres could therefore create close ties with companies, thus helping to promote the culture of learning and their courses. This would have a definite impact on the development of this apprenticeship scheme, which has been losing momentum in Tunisia for some years. The success of such an approach requires a flexible funding mechanism that ensures the activities of private operators.

In the future, training cheques could be granted only when a company expresses the need and willingness to take care of the beneficiary during the training.

Partnership committees of training centres need to be made functional again. The new decree on VET autonomy of March 2019 addresses this to some extent, although it may not go far enough in terms of granting autonomy of VET providers, as argued above. The participation of private sector professionals in the management of training centres is essential for bringing the worlds of education and work closer together and enabling WBL.

Status, reduced teaching loads and the reimbursement of travel expenses are central to trainers and apprenticeship counsellors at training centres fulfilling their assignments in relation to WBL. This includes the careful planning of all company training periods, ideally as an integral part of the VET curriculum, the selection of students together with the companies, and regular liaison with companies

to ensure, for example, the follow-up of students and joint assessments of progress. All this is very time-consuming and needs to be adequately accounted for in teachers' working hours.

Effort has been made and needs to continue to ensure trained tutors are available who can instruct and supervise trainees in companies. With a view to implementing workplace training support units, professional and trade union organisations could be entitled to certain funding, which would allow them to play their part in supervising members and be a credible and representative intermediary with the MJSIP. This is a very important aspect of the reform that got blocked. The training support units could be remunerated for the continuing training activities that they organise.

4. CONCLUSION

Without a more favourable environment for business growth and job creation, Tunisia's human capital potential is likely to remain underutilised. There is wide national consensus that the further integration of Tunisia into global value chains could help generate activities with a higher added value and jobs for a more highly qualified workforce. Policies are needed to adjust the business environment and modernise enterprises to help them grow. At the same time, more and higher-quality jobs require people with the right professional skills and competences. Vocational skills and qualifications are a key pillar of Tunisia's human capital stock, which is why the upgrading of initial and continuing VET deserves more political attention.

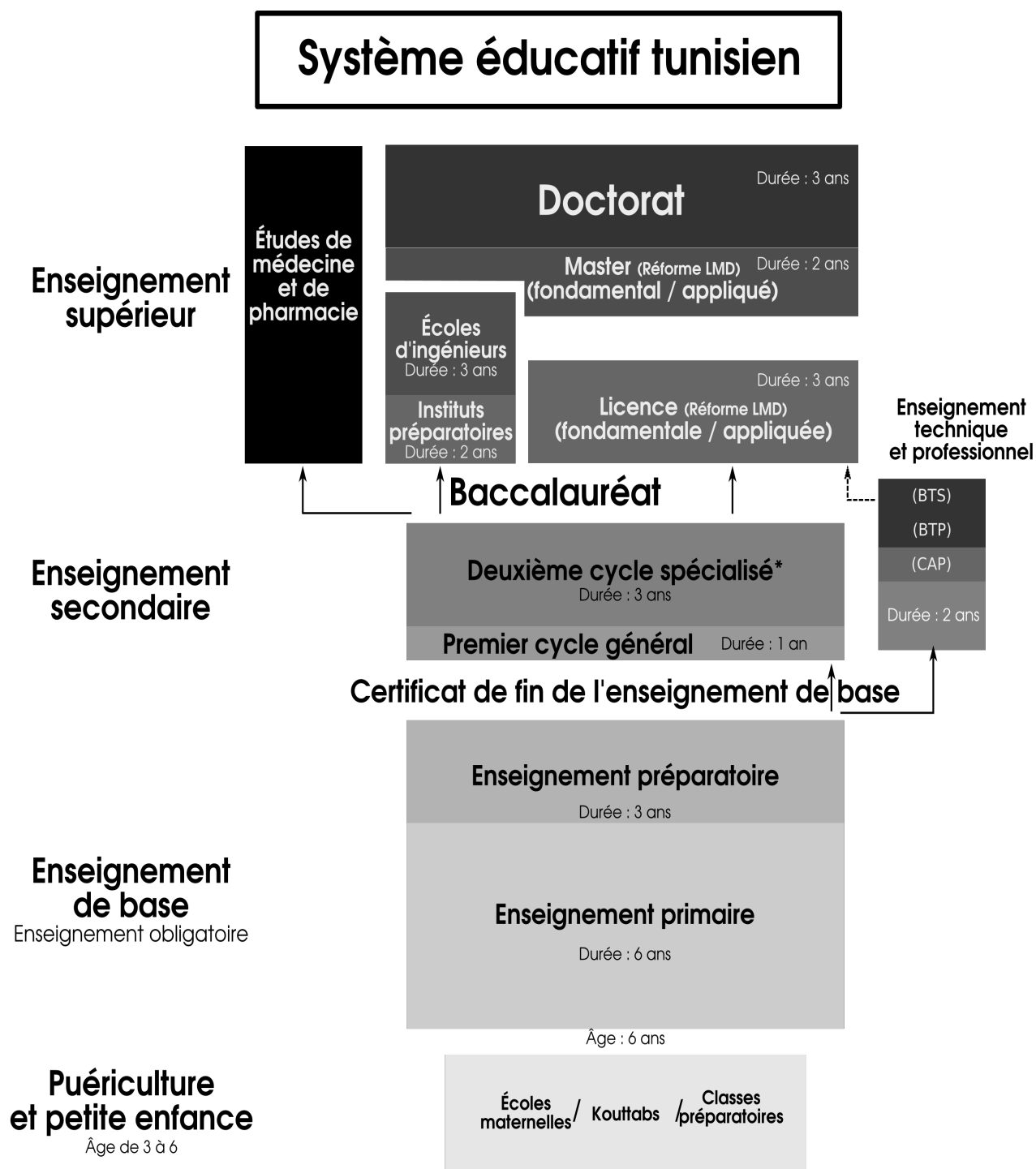
Addressing the above-described challenges and recommendations in a sustained, systematic manner can have an impact in the mid to long term on the efficiency and effectiveness of the initial and continuing VET system. It will improve the relevance and quality of its outcomes in terms of employable skills of young people and adults alike. It will help make better use of public, private and donor investments. Including more people in skills development schemes, preventing them from dropping out early, and equipping them with relevant labour market skills will strengthen Tunisia's human resource potential, improve the school-to-work transition and contribute to the country's goals of economic development and labour market and social inclusion.

ANNEX 1. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Key HCD issue	Recommendations		
	No.	Action	Description
Issue 1 Lack of external consistency or relevance of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system	R.1	Improve skills anticipation and career guidance for better labour market outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographic, social, labour market and skills data needs to be gathered more systematically at national, sectoral and regional levels. This data could inform a national plan for the restructuring of the network of public VET providers and programmes. Opportunities for career information, including online options, as well as counselling and guidance in and outside schools would help young people determine their future education and professional careers.
	R.2	Introduce new and coherent multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance arrangements at central, sectoral, regional and local levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an issue of operationalising the provisions of the Social Pact and fostering all kinds of public-private partnerships. Bipartite sector skills councils could help identify relevant skills and qualifications. The role of the ministry responsible for VET for overall strategy design, system planning and management, monitoring and evaluation would need to be strengthened. All national or regional training agencies and VET centres would have to operate under common national frameworks for qualifications, quality assurance, and accountability (reporting). More responsibilities shall be devolved to regional and local levels and the autonomy of VET providers be strengthened, in cooperation with their local partners.
	R.3	Introduce a monitoring and evaluation system to assess progress and inform policy design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VET providers would need to report regularly against a nationally agreed set of indicators, for which specific management tools and guidelines would be used. This includes a comprehensive VET management information system that could help monitor processes and outcomes of autonomous VET providers and plan VET enrolments, investments in staff and facilities, etc.
Issue 2 Lack of internal consistency or quality of the VET system	R.4	Strengthen the capacity of autonomous VET providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training centre managers and their partners could be entrusted to participate in key decisions relating to the choice of their training offers; the recruitment and (extra) remuneration of staff; the management of the training centre (including marketing its own courses, enrolments, the development of curricula, integrating WBL, and the design of teaching and learning resources); career guidance activities; the signing of agreements with companies; the signing of other contracts (such as for renting out premises or producing products or delivering services for the local community); and the generation and use of budget.

Key HCD issue	Recommendations		
	No.	Action	Description
			Social partners, students and family representatives can make useful contributions to the management and development of training centres.
	R.5	Improve the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of VET teachers and trainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ministry in charge of VET and different stakeholders should work together to agree on a CPD strategy, to improve the normative framework for VET teachers and trainers, to set objectives in the 2025 National Strategy for Vocational Education and to define a feasible action plan. The Centre National de Formation de Formateurs et d'Ingénierie de Formation (CENAFFIF), perhaps through collaboration with industry and other professional CPD providers, may review their programmes and introduce modern and varied methodologies. Tools need to be developed to identify needs and funding mechanisms for the technical training of teachers. Better coordination between regional structures and training centres and their partners is key to providing the required materials and human resources. Training centres have an important role in analysing their training requirements, and need to share and use this information for the planning and coordination of CPD.
	R.6	Extend and improve Work-Based Learning (WBL) arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning under the F0 apprenticeship scheme needs to be complemented with training at a centre. Employers may also make close ties with private training centres who offer complementary theoretical and soft skills training. The success of such an approach requires a flexible funding mechanism that ensures the activities of private operators. Training cheques might be granted only when a company is ready to take care of the intern during the training. The participation of private sector professionals in the management of training centres, reduced teaching loads and the reimbursement of travel expenses for school coordinators are essential for enabling WBL. Company training periods need to be carefully planned, ideally as an integral part of the VET curriculum. Trained tutors are encouraged to continue to instruct trainees in companies. The workplace training support units could be remunerated for the continuing training activities that they organise.

ANNEX 2. TUNISIA'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM



* Les sections sont : lettres, économie et gestion, mathématiques, sciences informatiques, sciences expérimentales, sciences techniques et sport.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFD	Agence Française de Développement/ French Development Agency
AFMT	Agence de Formation dans les Métiers du Tourisme/ Tourism Training Agency
ALMPs	Active Labour Market Policies
ANETI	Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi et le Travail Indépendant/ National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment
ATFP	Agence Tunisienne de la Formation Professionnelle/ Tunisian Agency for Vocational Education and Training
AVFA	Agence de la Vulgarisation et de la Formation Agricoles/ Agricultural Extension and Training Agency
BTP	Brevet de Technicien Professionnel (BTP)/ Professional Technician Certificate
BTS	Brevet de Technicien Supérieurs/ Higher Technician Certificate
CAP	Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle
CC	Certificat de Competence
CENAFFIF	Centre National de Formation de Formateurs et d'Ingénierie de Formation/ National Centre for Trainers' Training and Curriculum Development in VET
CNF CPP	Centre National de Formation Continue et de Promotion Professionnelle/ National Centre for Continuing Training and Professional Promotion
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEMM	EU/ETF project on Gouvernance pour l'Employabilité dans la Méditerranée/ Governance for Employability in the Mediterranean
IACE	Institut Arabe des Chefs d'Entreprises
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INS	Institut National de la Statistique/National Institute for Statistics
IRADA	EU-funded Initiative régionale d'appui au développement économique durable/Regional Initiative for Sustainable Economic Development
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITCEQ	Institut Tunisien de la Compétitivité et des Études Quantitatives

LFS	Labour Force Survey
MANFORME	Programme de Mise à Niveau de la Formation Professionnelle et de l'Emploi
MDICI	Ministry of Development, Investment and International Cooperation
MESRS	Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique/ Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
MFPE	(ex) Ministère de la Formation Professionnelle et de l'Emploi/ Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment
MJSIP	Ministère de la Jeunesse, du Sport et de l'Intégration Professionnelle/ Ministry of Youth, Sports and Professional Integration
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)
NEETs	(young persons) Not in Education, Employment or Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONEQ	Observatoire National de l'Emploi et des Qualifications/ Tunisian National Observatory for Employment and Qualifications
PAFIP	Programme d'Appui à la Formation et à l'Insertion Professionnelle/ Programme to support training and job integration
PEFESE	Programme d'appui au système de l'Education/Formation – Enseignement Supérieur et Employabilité des diplômés
PISA	(OECD's) Programme for International Student Assessment
TND	Tunisian Dinar
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	Work-Based Learning

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